THE Nation.

SPECIAL YOUTH ISSUE

THE OBAMA GENERATION

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
ELIZABETH MÉNDEZ BERRY

NOVEMBER 23, 2009
TheNation.com

STONEWALL 2.0
CHRISTOPHER LISOTTA

THE YOUNG AND THE JOBLESS
LIZZY RATNER

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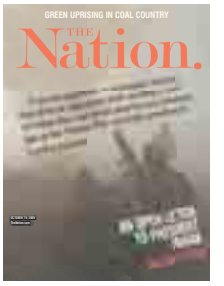

Understanding Afghanistan

HOLTS SUMMIT, MO.
Three cheers to William R. Polk for his "Open Letter to President Obama" [Oct. 19]. I now know more to back up the intuitive hunch I had that a military conflict is not the answer. Articles such as these keep my subscription to *The Nation* current.
JOSEPH P. BACHANT

GRATON, CALIF.
Bravo to William R. Polk for his brilliant perspective on Afghanistan and its many hopeful invaders. And also praise for the clarity of the writing—not the usual academic, Talmudic mumbo jumbo that keeps *The Nation* from achieving the greater circulation it so richly deserves.
ERIC W. KRITZ

ARDMORE, OKLA.
The letter to the president was brilliant—superbly written, with common-sense suggestions for solving the problems our country faces in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir. Here's hoping the president will adopt them. By doing so, he will avoid becoming another LBJ, who famously refused to consider any course but escalation of military involvement in Southeast Asia and thus ended his presidency.
JAMES CLARK

CHICAGO
I read with great interest and respect the letter to President Obama—informed and knowledgeable, seasoned with experience and wise reflection. I hope you sent the letter to the White House.
WILLIAM A. BURZYNSKI

Dick's Flip to the Dark Side

RICHMOND HILL, ONTARIO, CANADA
Sebastian Jones surely sank whatever was left of Gephardt's reputation as a progressive in "Dick Gephardt's Spectacular Sellout" [Oct. 19]. One more example: he is a highly paid genocide-denier for the Turkish government, which is more shameful since as a Congressman, Gephardt co-sponsored a resolution placing the Armenian genocide in the company of the Holocaust, Cambodia and Rwanda.
GERALD CAPLAN

BOISE, IDAHO
The best moment in Sebastian Jones's piece is when a Gephardt supporter calls him "a man of incredible credibility"—a line worthy of W. himself.
R.K. SANDERSON

NAACP: Social Service & Social Justice

SAN FRANCISCO
Ta-Nehisi Coates's "The Trials of Benjamin Jealous" [July 20/27], on our NAACP president and CEO, had several inaccuracies and a flawed conclusion. First, Coates claims that Myrlie Evers Williams followed Ben Chavis as president of the organization, which is not true. We are extremely proud of Evers's stellar tenure as the first woman chair of the national board, but she was never president. Second, the claim that Jealous had no direct ties to the civil rights movement was a strange and erroneous statement, considering that his entire family was steeped in the civil rights movement, from sit-ins to segregation protests to voter registration drives. Jealous, in fact, is a fifth-generation NAACP member.

Coates quotes me from an article printed during the campaign for the NAACP presidency, when I supported another candidate. By running only that old quote, Coates gave a false impression of steep division over Jealous's leadership. Had Coates had the decency to call me, I would have given our president a ringing endorsement: Jealous has attracted new membership—up by more than 30 percent—grown our staff by more than 50 percent and brought the NAACP into the black two years in a row. Under his leadership, we are launching aggressive new campaigns on criminal justice, economic injustice, health, democracy, climate change and more.

Coates also misrepresents our philosophy in an attempt to parse social service and social justice. It is a false dichotomy. We strongly advocate holding government accountable by

(continued on page 32)

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Stalling Justice

In Texas and Illinois, recent controversies have exposed our broken criminal justice system. Mounting evidence indicates that Texas Governor Rick Perry ordered the wrongful execution

EDITORIAL

of Cameron Todd Willingham in 2004 and has subsequently tried to cover up the details of the case, recently dismissing three experts on the state's Forensic Science Commission forty-eight hours before they were set to examine the evidence. Willingham's case has rightly generated national headlines, and another case of prosecutorial overreach is unfolding in Illinois.

On the evening of September 15, 1978, a white security guard named Donald Lundahl was murdered in a robbery gone awry in a racially fraught southern suburb of Chicago. Police fingered Anthony McKinney, an 18-year-old African-American with no criminal record, as the killer. The prosecution sought death by lethal injection; the judge sentenced McKinney to life in prison.

McKinney has long maintained his innocence. Based on newly uncovered evidence, there's strong reason to believe that he has spent thirty-one years in prison for a crime he did not commit.

When it comes to capital punishment, Illinois differs from Texas in one important respect: in 2000 the Land of Lincoln's Republican governor, George Ryan, issued a moratorium on the death penalty, and in 2003 he granted clemency to all death-row inmates. Ryan announced his decision at Northwestern University, citing the work of Northwestern journalism professor David Protess and his students at the Medill School of Journalism, who had uncovered evidence that helped free five wrongly convicted men from death row.

In 2003 Protess and his students began examining McKinney's case. Over three years of painstaking reporting, they unearthed startling new evidence: the prosecution's two main witnesses, 15 and 18 at the time of the trial, recanted their testimony during interviews with the students, claiming they were beaten by the police and intimidated into doctoring the facts; McKinney alleged that he was beaten with a pipe by a detective with a history of police brutality before signing a sham confession; TV logs proved that both witnesses were watching a boxing match at the time of the shooting and thus could not have seen the murder; an ex–gang member, Anthony Drake, confessed on tape to being at the murder scene, named two perpetrators and said McKinney was not involved; current and former residents of the neighborhood confirmed they heard Drake and two other suspects confess to Lundahl's murder.

In 2006 the Medill Innocence Project turned over its findings to the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern's law school. The center shared the evidence with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, which began an internal investigation the following year. After more than a year of delay by the state, the center filed a postconviction petition on behalf of McKinney in October 2008, calling for a new trial or his immediate release. Following her election that November as Cook County State's Attorney, hardline career prosecutor Anita Alvarez fought the discovery of new evidence, and in May she issued a sweeping, unprecedented subpoena ordering Protess to hand over all material related to the McKinney case—including students' private memos and grades. Alvarez insultingly suggested that students might receive better grades for uncovering exculpatory evidence and claimed that Protess and his students were "investigators," not journalists, and thus not subject to the Illinois

Inside

2 **Letters**

Editorials & Comment

3 **Stalling Justice**

4 **Doctorow's Newspaper**

5 **Election Tea Leaves**
JOHN NICHOLS

6 **Capitolism**
What Ails the Senate
CHRISTOPHER HAYES

6 **Obama, One Year On**
KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

8 **The Google Settlement**
PAMELA SAMUELSON

Columns

6 **Deadline Poet**
'G.O.P. Candidate, Pushed by Right…'
CALVIN TRILLIN

11 **The Liberal Media**
Sarah, Smile
ERIC ALTERMAN

12 **Beneath the Radar**
Europe's Left: Not Dead Yet
GARY YOUNGE

Articles

13 **The Obama Generation, Revisited**
The 2008 election galvanized young voters and organizers. Where are they now?
ELIZABETH MÉNDEZ BERRY

20 **Back to the USSA**
The country's oldest student association has its eyes on the prize: student aid reform.
TE-PING CHEN

23 **Generation Recession**
Young people have lost 2.5 million jobs, making them the hardest-hit age group.
LIZZY RATNER

26 **The State of Youth Organizing**
KRISTINA RIZGA

28 **Stonewall 2.0**
Since California's Prop 8, a new generation of gay activists have jumped into the fray.
CHRISTOPHER LISOTTA

31 **Tales of the Great Recession**
JIM MILLER, DEBORAH GHIM

Books & the Arts

33 **GLADWELL:** Outliers • What the Dog Saw
MAUREEN TKACIK

38 **Early Capitalism** (POEM)
JOE WENDEROTH

42 **FILMS:** Precious: Based on the Novel "Push" by Sapphire • The Messenger • The Sun
STUART KLAWANS

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY LUCAS JACKSON/REUTERS, DESIGN BY GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/AVENGING ANGELS; ILLUSTRATIONS BY JANNA BROWER AND EDWIN VAZQUEZ

VOLUME 289, NUMBER 17, NOVEMBER 23, 2009
PRINTED NOVEMBER 4

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SUBMISSIONS: Queries only, no manuscripts. Go to www.thenation.com and click on "about," then "submissions" for a query form. Queries may be mailed to The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. SASE for poems.

INTERNET: Selections from the current issue become available Thursday night at www.thenation.com.

Printed on 100% recycled 40% post-consumer acid- and chlorine-free paper, in the USA.

This week at TheNation.com

News & Analysis

Greg Kaufmann: The heart of Wall Street

Sharon Lerner: Where's the birth control?

Greg Grandin: In Honduras, a solution—or stalling?

SlideShow Winners and losers of Election 2009

Blogs John Nichols: Tough Democratic losses and a couple of sweet victories

Emily Douglas: Marriage in Maine, losing forward

shield law. (A proposed federal shield law circulating in Congress, while commendable, would affect only a minority of subpoenas, protecting confidential sources but failing to cover reporters' unpublished work.) Apparently Alvarez has never heard of investigative journalism.

Judge Diane Cannon, a former career prosecutor in Cook County, approved the subpoena, which Protess is challenging in court. "Prosecutors should be more concerned with the wrongful conviction of Anthony McKinney than with my students' grades," he says.

The state's subpoena, wielded to stall justice and intimidate those who seek it, sets a terrible precedent. Lawyer Barry Scheck says that in his seventeen years at the Innocence Project in New York, he's never seen a subpoena of this nature directed at journalists or lawyers. Concludes Jonathan Turley, a constitutional law expert at George Washington University, "It creates an enormous chilling effect that's positively glacial."

Judge Cannon will soon rule on the validity of the state's subpoena. We urge her to throw it out and order a prompt evidentiary hearing. The kind of difficult reporting undertaken by the Medill Innocence Project should be celebrated, not undermined. It's shocking that the state would rather keep an innocent man behind bars than admit a mistake.

Nine groups of student journalists from Medill have interviewed McKinney in prison. By their accounts, he's a fragile and gentle man who's battled severe depression during three decades of wrongful incarceration. "If the state had gotten its way," Protess notes, "he would have been executed long ago." A new trial, if not unconditional release, is long overdue. The truth won't bring back Cameron Todd Willingham, but it can still free Anthony McKinney.

Doctorow's Newspaper

Figuring out what to do about the death of newspapers has become nearly a full-time job for many people—people who would much rather be putting out newspapers. Perhaps there will be a newspaper in the future that will be about nothing but the future of newspapers.

EDITORIAL

In the meantime, we might take comfort from an idea put forth by "Langley Collyer"—the version imagined by E.L. Doctorow in his novel *Homer & Langley*, not the historical one. Doctorow's Langley is enamored of a concept he has invented called the Theory of Replacements. As his brother (and Boswell), Homer, explains: "Everything in life gets replaced. We are our parents' replacements just as they were replacements of the previous generation." Time, Langley has told him, "advances through us as we replace ourselves to fill the slots," and this theory has spurred him to conceive an "ultimate newspaper," which contains within it categories for every imaginable human event. (He has collected stacks and stacks of newspapers in support of this effort.) Langley's ambition is to "fix American life finally in one edition," to create an "eternally current dateless newspaper."

Well, that would be something. And it just might work on

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the Internet, too, if you could find a way to fund the research. Goodness knows, neither Homer nor Langley had enough money, energy or, in the end, sanity, to pull it off. But as Jerome Charyn wrote in a perceptive review in the *Wall Street Journal*, "In the end, Langley's vast, mercurial newspaper can be seen as a reflection of Mr. Doctorow's own work—his writing career has often seemed like a long, slippery quest to pin down the American story, and the American language, preserving it in one eternal edition." The Collyer brothers, Charyn smartly observes, are "mirrors of himself—poet and archivist, creator and destroyer, whose words remain a ghostly presence in readers' minds."

One scholar has speculated that the final American newspaper will appear on someone's doorstep in 2043. Philip Roth recently told Tina Brown in an interview for the Daily Beast that he could not imagine the novel lasting as a significant cultural entity for more than, say, the next twenty-five years. Let's hope this is personal pessimism rather than actual prediction speaking. But in the meantime, let's be grateful that we have Langley's concept to remind us why we need newspapers in the first place. They help make humans of us, reminding us of our connections not only to one another but to our pasts and what remains of our future.

And who knows what Homer and Langley might have come up with if, indeed, they had had the Internet. Either they (and their author) would have invented something new and marvelous, or else found some other form of junk under which to bury themselves, which unfortunately is pretty much where we stand in our quest to find the future of newspapers.

Election Tea Leaves

COMMENT

It is certainly fair to search for signals in the results of off-year elections, and that goes double for off-year elections held at so volatile a moment as this. But not all elections are equal. Races for mayoralties and governorships tend to fit the "all politics are local" standard. But special elections for open Congressional seats, especially when they're held on the eve of votes on critical issues like healthcare reform and banking regulation, are exactly the right places to spot trends relating to Washington debates and 2010 Congressional contests.

So what did we learn from the off-year elections? New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine, a good Democrat who was hurt badly by the economic downturn, which has rocked state governments across the country, lost by a relatively narrow margin to Republican Chris Christie. Corzine started the race with poll numbers so weak that Democrats spoke openly about replacing him as their nominee. It didn't help that the governor made his millions on Wall Street; as New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's surprisingly narrow win illustrated, it's not a good year for wealthy, self-funded contenders. But Corzine battled his way back into contention, if not quite to victory, by highlighting support for healthcare reform and aligning with President Obama.

Virginia Democrat Creigh Deeds, who ran away from reform and his party's president, was beaten badly in a state where voters who provided Obama's winning margin in 2008—particularly young people—stayed home in 2009. Deeds was the wrong candidate for governor, and Democrats should learn the lesson that running to the right depresses turnout among the new voters who have powered the party's progress in recent years.

There is a human cost to losing governorships, particularly since Congress might allow states to opt out of implementing the public option on healthcare reform, which is critical to expanding access. There could also be a political cost, since redistricting fights will begin with the completion of the 2010 Census. With those factors in mind, the gubernatorial losses in states Obama won last year are all the more disappointing.

Equally disappointing was the repeal of Maine's law allowing same-sex couples to marry. There was better news from Washington State, where a proposal to expand domestic partnership protections won. And Kalamazoo voted overwhelmingly to retain a law barring discrimination against gays and lesbians. Draconian proposals to limit the ability of state and local governments to raise revenues for needed programs lost in both Maine and Washington, suggesting that the antigovernment thrust of the "tea party" right is not resonating with voters who are given clear choices.

A similar message came from the two special Congressional elections, which provided Obama and the Democrats with the best news of the day. Indeed, for all the spin suggesting the November 3 elections were a setback for the president and his party, the fact is that they gained one House seat in New York and a more reliable and activist House ally in California. The New York contest was a high-profile one because of a GOP donnybrook that suggests the party that could not shoot straight in 2006 and 2008 continues to miss the target as the 2010 elections approach. Local Republicans tried to broaden the party's base by nominating a social moderate who had worked well with organized labor; national conservatives, led by Sarah Palin, the tea-party crowd and the corporate-funded Club for Growth, swept in to back the candidate of New York's Conservative Party, who hailed Fox News commentator Glenn Beck as his "mentor." Undermined and frustrated, the GOP nominee suspended her campaign and backed Democrat Bill Owens. The right-wingers declared victory in their fight for "the soul of the party." But on election night Owens won a seat that had been Republican since Ulysses S. Grant occupied the Oval Office.

The results from a special House election in California were even more encouraging. California Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi is a veteran reformer and rabble-rouser who took on the insurance industry as his state's elected insurance commissioner and promised during his campaign to "fight for a robust public option [and] continue to be a tireless advocate for single-payer healthcare." His GOP opponent ran ads declaring, "This November, one race for Congress matters most. If [Garamendi] is elected, he will be a surefire vote for government-run healthcare." Garamendi stuck to his guns and won with ease. He'll be dramatically more progressive than his predecessor, Ellen Tauscher, who was allied with the Blue Dogs. And Garamendi's experience with insurance issues will make him a valuable addition to the Democratic caucus at a critical point. That's something to celebrate. JOHN NICHOLS

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What Ails the Senate

In 1994, after Democrats lost control of the Senate, Senator Joe Lieberman called a press conference with his colleague Tom Harkin to announce their plan to reform the filibuster. "[People] are fed up—frustrated and fed up and angry about the way in which our government does not work," Lieberman said. "And I think the filibuster has become not only in reality an obstacle to accomplishment here, but it is also a symbol of a lot that ails Washington today." Lieberman and Harkin's proposal to weaken the filibuster came to a floor vote and was overwhelmingly defeated by both parties.

Recently it was this same Joe Lieberman, now officially an independent but with a coveted committee chairmanship given to him by his Democratic colleagues, who announced he would use that very same filibuster to stop 35 million people from getting health insurance if there was any public option offered within the health reform legislation. As he no doubt expected, his grandstanding earned him an invitation onto *Face the Nation*, where he repeated his threat.

If there's a consistency to be found here, it's that in both cases, Lieberman seemed to take a delight in undermining the legislative priorities of his ostensible allies in the Democratic caucus. But the problem isn't so much that Lieberman is wrong now (though, of course, he is). The problem is that he was right then.

The filibuster has become a cancer growing inside the world's greatest deliberative body. What was once a rarely invoked procedural mechanism has metastasized and turned into a de facto supermajority requirement for any legislation. In the 103rd Congress (1993–94) there were forty-six votes on "cloture," the motion to override a filibuster and allow something to be considered on the floor. In the last Congress, the 110th, the first one in which Republicans were in the minority, there were a record 112. Even without the filibuster, our system already has more choke points where legislation can die than almost any other liberal democracy. It's rare for one party to control both houses of Congress and the White House, and to have as solid a majority as the Democrats currently do. But the filibuster confers such power on an obstinate minority that it distorts the relationship between elections and governance in a way that dangerously attenuates democracy itself.

The filibuster may seem like an arcane procedural issue to rail on about (we've already published excellent articles about it in these pages by William Greider and Thomas Geoghegan), but it has serious substantive results. America desperately needs a twenty-first-century social democratic reformation, but no such thing is in the offing as long as the filibuster remains in place. As I write this, there are almost certainly fifty-one votes in the Senate for a healthcare reform bill with a public option and good subsidies, the Employee Free Choice Act, and cap and trade. But there aren't sixty votes for any of those.

The filibuster has been reformed before, most recently when the Democratic majority in 1975 voted to bring the requirement to end debate from sixty-seven votes to sixty. As a constitutional issue, the Senate makes its own rules, which means a simple majority vote can change them. It was, after all, Republicans who made this identical argument in 2005 when they threatened to use the "nuclear option" to override Democratic filibusters of their judicial nominees.

Many progressives then, shamefully, marshaled arguments in favor of the filibuster, and many today will no doubt fear that its revocation will come back to haunt us in the future when the right regains power. But the filibuster is a conservative impediment in the deepest sense: it maintains the status quo. And, Lord knows, this country needs change.

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

'G.O.P. Candidate, Pushed By Right, Ends Upstate Bid'

—The New York Times

The GOP's chief commissars had heard
That there was trouble in the 23rd:
Though every county chairman there had voted
For Dede Scozzafava, it was noted
That she, though certainly a high achiever,
Was not, in fact, a zealous true believer.
If any of the canon caused her doubt,
That justified their push to throw her out.
All commissars need neither rhyme nor reason.
They know that deviation's always treason.

Obama, One Year On

COMMENT

Barack Obama was elected president at a time defined by hope and fear in equal measure. It was a remarkable moment in our country's history—a milestone in America's scarred racial landscape and a victory for the forces of decency, diversity and tolerance. For the first time in decades, electoral politics became a vehicle for raising expectations and spreading hope while it mobilized millions of new voters. Obama's was a campaign built on the power and promise of change from below. At the same time, he was elected as the nation was rapidly sinking into the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

The night Obama was elected, relief was felt around the world. There was a widespread feeling that the United States had turned its back on eight years of destructive, swaggering unilateralism and was re-embracing the global community. In

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many ways, the election was a referendum on an extremist conservatism that has guided (and deformed) American politics and society since the 1980s. The spectacular failures of the Bush administration and the shifts in public opinion on the economy and the Iraq War presented a mandate for bold action and a historic opportunity for a progressive governing agenda.

A year later, it's clear we are a long way from building a new order and reshaping the prevailing paradigm of American politics. That will take more than one election. It requires continued mobilization, strategic creativity and, yes, audacity on the part of independent thinkers, activists and organizers. The structural obstacles to change are considerable. But at least we now have the political space to push for far-reaching reforms.

Whatever one thinks of Obama's policy on any specific issue, he is clearly a reform president committed to the improvement of people's lives and to the renewal and reconstruction of America. Yes, his economic recovery plan was too small and too deferential to the Republican Party and tax cuts. But it has kept the economy from falling into the abyss, and it includes more new net public investment in antipoverty measures than any program since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

We need a much more robust jobs program—without one, Americans will not believe this president stands with the working people. Obama would be wise to use his presidential pulpit and brilliant oratorical skills to explain that when one out of six Americans is unemployed or underemployed, our greatest fear should be joblessness, not deficits.

Still, there's much to be praised. Obama has spoken eloquently of a new and progressive role for government. His first appointment to the Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor, was a strong choice—the first Latina on the Court and a powerful progressive jurist. In selecting Sotomayor, Obama has finally halted the Court's long drift to the right. The president says the labor movement is the solution, not the problem. (If he really believes this, he should act on it by pushing for speedy passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.) He has reinvigorated the regulatory agencies in Washington, from the EPA to the FCC (in doing so he has, ironically, fueled a full-employment program for K Street lobbyists). He has repealed the global gag rule on abortion, has spoken of the urgency of the climate crisis and has restored integrity to the government's scientific research programs.

The president's quartet of major speeches abroad—in Cairo, Prague, Moscow and Accra—began to lay out an Obama Doctrine in international affairs: support for diplomacy and the UN; commitment to a nuclear-free world; a belief that democracy is strengthened not through US intervention but when people win for themselves their rights and liberties; and engagement and cooperation with, rather than antagonism toward, the Muslim world. However, the military-industrial complex Eisenhower warned against grows ever stronger. And so far Obama has been unwilling to rethink skewed priorities in this arena; he just approved a bloated military budget despite his rare cancellation of several costly weapons programs.

And then, of course, there is Afghanistan. Historians have warned that wars kill reform presidencies. The most recent, and perhaps most relevant, example is the Vietnam War's undermining of the Great Society. Obama is wisely taking his time to make a decision about Afghanistan, but he appears to have excluded the one option that makes the most sense—a responsible exit strategy—and seems poised to escalate this unnecessary war. If he does so, he will endanger his reform presidency and squander funds needed to rebuild and renew our country.

Obama could have used the moment of economic crisis to restructure the economy and rein in the financial sector, not simply resuscitate it. The taxpayer-funded bailout of the banks has contributed to a popular backlash. If Obama doesn't respond to the widespread anguish and anger with constructive support for those in need, the GOP will continue to channel it in destructive directions.

There are other disappointments. I am sure you have your list. At the top of mine is Obama's failure to end the excesses and abuses associated with the Bush/Cheney national security apparatus; also on it is his unwillingness to push more strongly for a public option on healthcare reform. But instead of playing the betrayal sweepstakes, which promotes disappointment and despair, we'd be smart to practice a progressive politics defined by realistic hope and pragmatism. That is, simply denouncing the administration's missteps and failures doesn't get us very far and furthers what our adversaries seek: our disempowerment. We can't afford that. These are times to avoid falling into either of two extremes: reflexively defensive or reflexively critical.

Remember that throughout our history, it has taken large-scale, sustained organizing to win structural change. There would have been no New Deal without the vast upsurge in union activism and unemployed councils, no civil rights legislation without the mass movement. We need to learn from those inspiring examples and build our own movements. And we need to start playing inside-outside politics too: engage the administration and Congress, even as we push without apology for bolder solutions than the ones Obama has offered.

Progressives should focus less on the limits of the Obama agenda and more on the possibilities that his presidency opens up. Like all presidents, Obama is constrained by powerful opponents and deep structural impediments. Independent organizing and savvy coalition-building will be critical in overcoming the timid incrementalists of his own party and the forces of money and establishment power that are obstacles to change. But if we work effectively, we can push Obama beyond the limits of his own politics and create a new progressive era.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

The Google Settlement

COMMENT

Let's start with two givens. First, Google is an outstandingly innovative company. Millions of us use Google search, e-mail, maps and other applications on a daily, if not hourly, basis. Second, Google is no more above the law than any other company, no matter how much social benefit one of its projects would arguably bestow on society. Yet its proposed settlement of a copyright lawsuit initially brought by some authors and publishers goes far beyond what class-action settlements

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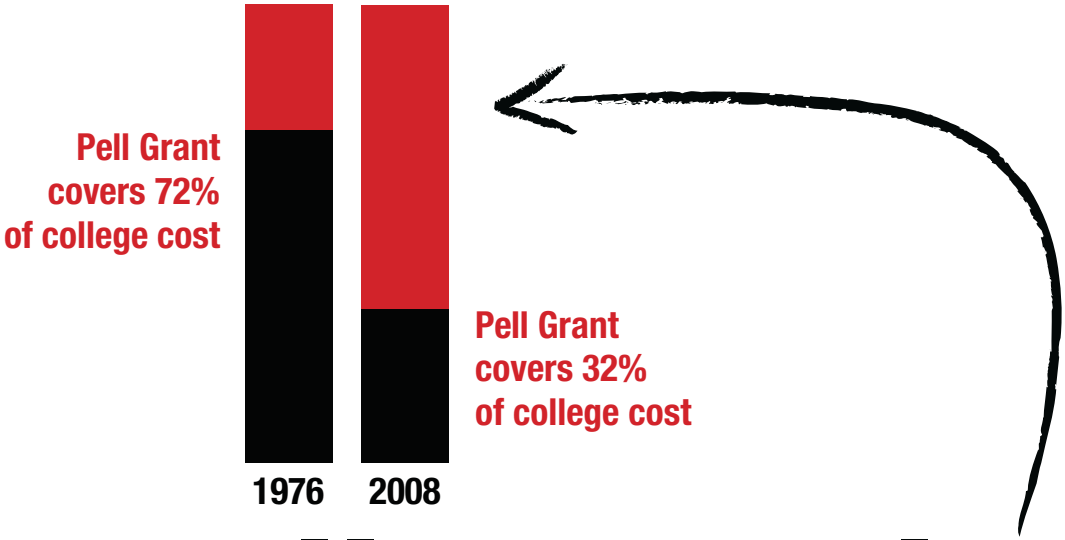

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are supposed to achieve and is tantamount to private legislation.

Google has been scanning books from major research libraries, such as the University of Michigan, since 2004. The initial goal was to index the contents of books to provide snippets to users whose queries yielded Google Book Search (GBS) results. Google believed that its scanning of in-copyright books was fair use, because it wasn't displaying substantial parts of book contents and because it facilitated access to them by linking to libraries or bookstores from which they could be obtained. (A fair use does not infringe copyright, insofar as it is done for a beneficial purpose and does not unreasonably harm the copyright owners' interests.)

In fall 2005 the Authors Guild and five major book publishers sued Google, claiming that its book scanning was copyright infringement. Soon thereafter, Google began negotiating a settlement of this dispute with the guild and members of the Association of American Publishers. In October 2008 Google, the guild and the AAP collectively announced a settlement agreement they had devised on behalf of a class of all people who own a US copyright interest in one or more books, with the guild representing the author subclass and the AAP the publisher subclass. Because of US treaty obligations, the proposed settlement class includes all owners of copyright interests in all books in the world. Google has pledged $125 million to settle the lawsuit, $45.5 million of which will go to the lawyers who negotiated it. (The lawyers are getting $500,000 more than Google has set aside for payments to rights holders of all of the in-copyright books now in the GBS corpus.)

Members of the class had until September 4 to opt out, object, oppose or comment on the settlement. The court received more than 400 submissions about the settlement, the overwhelming majority of which expressed opposition, objections or concerns. Among the objectors were the governments of France and Germany, several states, and prominent authors such as Harold Bloom and Michael Chabon. Library associations and academic authors expressed concern about lack of user privacy and risks of price-gouging. Amazon.com, Microsoft, Yahoo! and the Justice Department asserted that the deal was anticompetitive and a misuse of the class-action process.

In late September the lawyers for the author and publisher subclasses asked the court for time to work on amendments to respond to the Justice Department's concerns. A revised settlement is expected to be filed by November 9, and the lawyers have asked the judge to hold a hearing about whether to approve the settlement by the end of the year.

So what does the deal provide, and why are some opposed to it? The main feature of the proposed settlement agreement is the license it would give Google—and Google alone—to commercialize all in-copyright out-of-print books, in three ways: through the sale of ads next to search results that yield GBS responses, consumer purchase of individual books that will be available on Google servers, and institutional subscriptions to libraries and the like. Google would keep 37 percent of these revenues and would give the other 63 percent to a newly created Book Rights Registry, which would be responsible for finding rights holders and paying them for Google's use of their books.

The fundamental idea underlying class-action lawsuits is one all good liberals can get behind: corporations sometimes do bad things to others (e.g., their customers). Often the harm to each person is too small to make it worthwhile to bring individual lawsuits. Yet in aggregate, the harm to similarly injured persons may be very large indeed. If a firm overcharges a million customers $10 each for the same item, for instance, the aggregate harm is $10 million. Class-action lawsuits allow recovery of the aggregate harm to the class; and if these lawsuits are settled, as many of them are, class members will generally get some benefit (e.g., a $5 refund) and, one hopes, wrongdoers will be deterred.

The GBS agreement is, however, less a settlement of a class-action lawsuit than a forward-looking commercial joint venture that far exceeds in scope the scanning-to-index issue being litigated. Class-action settlements typically resolve only the specific dispute between the parties. The more forward-looking the settlement, the broader its scope, the broader the class and the more the deal tries to release the defendant from liability for future conduct—especially conduct different in kind from the litigated issue—the less likely it is that judges will approve it. The GBS deal is troublesome on all four grounds. Moreover, serious questions exist about whether the authors and publishers who negotiated the settlement adequately and fairly represented the interests of the class as a whole.

An important policy underlying the requirement that named plaintiffs in class-action lawsuits fairly and adequately represent the interests of the defined class is to prevent collusion between plaintiffs and defendants that would accomplish an outcome beneficial for them but not so much for other class members. With the powerfully strong commercial interests at stake in *Authors Guild Inc., et al. v. Google Inc.*, there is reason to be concerned about the GBS settlement agreement, with its extensive new regime for rights clearances; procedures for determining the copyright and in- or out-of-print status of books; and criteria for price-setting for subscriptions, payout schedules and compulsory dispute resolution, among other things. Dozens of authors have argued that the GBS settlement is fundamentally unfair to them. Of particular concern to academic authors is that once the settlement is approved, Google has the right to sell the corpus to anyone—even Rupert Murdoch or China—if it so chooses.

Google is arguing that the settlement should be approved because of the social benefit of providing greater public access to out-of-print books. However, an extensive restructuring of the market for digital books, such as the one the GBS deal would accomplish, should be done either on a voluntary basis with consenting book rights holders or through legislation. Arguments that the settlement is in the public interest should be directed to Congress, not the courts. Private legislation through the GBS class-action settlement would set a dangerous precedent and undermine democratic values. PAMELA SAMUELSON

Pamela Samuelson, the Richard M. Sherman Distinguished Professor of Law and Information at the University of California, Berkeley, is a director of the Berkeley Center for Law & Technology.

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Eric Alterman

Sarah, Smile

Smart conservatives have rightfully bemoaned the lack of respect their fellow ideologues show for the values of legitimate journalism or scholarship. In May a young conservative named Conor Friedersdorf observed that the alleged leftward tilt of the MSM was not due to "any elite liberal conspiracy"; it's that "the right," he lamented, "has a problem with narrative."

Think about it. Who are the most successful models of conservative journalism? William F. Buckley Jr. and William Kristol—ideological entrepreneurs and political publicists, not honest journalists. (Buckley helped conceal evidence he expected would have resulted in the impeachment of Richard Nixon. Kristol, meanwhile, consistently makes assertions he is far too intelligent to believe on behalf of policies he happens to support.) Now, compare them with liberal role models, such as journalists I.F. Stone and Seymour Hersh, or scholars like Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Richard Rorty.

The next generation of right-wing journalists, are, like their forebears, largely apparatchiks. *National Review*'s Jonah Goldberg writes a comically uninformed book in which he equates liberalism with fascism (much like the young Buckley's paean to Joe McCarthy). *The Weekly Standard*'s Michael Goldfarb, like his mentor Kristol, shuttles back and forth between the role of Republican flack and alleged journalist without changing even a comma in his prose "style." *The New Republic*'s neocon hit man James Kirchick is so deeply dedicated to his boss Marty Peretz's imagined enemies that the two writers were once forced to switch their bylines after a piece had been posted.

I had higher hopes for young *Weekly Standard* writer Matthew Continetti. His first book, on the corruption of the so-called Gingrich revolution, while lightly researched, was smart and well written. I even praised it in print, something rather rare for a *Nation* columnist reviewing a book by a *Weekly Standard* writer.

But with his new book, an even more lightly researched study of the alleged "persecution" by the "elite media" of Sarah Palin, I see that Continetti has decided to hell with all that and embraced the tactics of his ideological predecessors. For this he has been rewarded with blurbs by such journalistic luminaries as Karl Rove ("tough, revealing"), Brit Hume ("compelling") and Michael Barone ("the truth"). It's a sad commentary to note that these three are also considered respected members of the conservative media, because if they actually believe their own words, they would not recognize an honest work of journalism if it shot them in the face.

To be fair, Continetti is handicapped by his subject's refusal to speak to him for the book as well as her snap decision to quit her job without a credible explanation. (And perhaps as a result, his readers are handicapped by his refusal to support anything he claims with source notes, an index or a bibliography.) He asserts hypocrisy on the part of the "elite media" bent on Palin's "persecution," an assertion he pretends to prove by quoting descriptions of the ex-governor, on the one hand, and dissimilar descriptions of her opponents, on the other. But never does Continetti demonstrate much interest in employing equivalent or even terribly similar examples. More risibly, his idea of the MSM apparently includes: Naomi Wolf, "MarkB," Jamie Lee Curtis, "ArcXIX," Roger Ebert, Gawker, Buzzfeed.com, Catherine Deveny of Australia's *The Age*, Heather Mallic of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's website, comedian Bill Maher, ex-junkie/crackhead British comedian Russell Brand, Hustler Video and, I kid you not, "a Chinese language newspaper."

His logic, moreover, is a wonder to behold. It was "telling," he writes, that Tina Fey should impersonate Palin. Why? Palin "is professionally successful, has been married for more than 20 years, and has a large and (from all outward appearances) happy family." And yet Fey, also (apparently) a happily married, professionally successful mother, nevertheless portrays characters in films and TV who "are hard-pressed eggheads who give up personal fulfillment—e.g., marriage and motherhood—in the pursuit of professional success." Get it? The actress plays imperfect individuals in her (comedy) roles. That proves, um, well, I can't tell you, and neither, alas, can Continetti.

The English professor in me, moreover, cannot help but note an interesting grammatical conflation on the part of the author. Continetti (and his copy editor) cannot decide whether the two nouns he deploys most frequently in this work—"media" and "elite"—are singular or plural. Sometimes they are an "it" and sometimes they are a "they." This bespeaks not only the lack of a decent education but also an intellectual confusion on the part of the author. Are the "elite media" a monolith, in which there is no distinction to be made between, say, the news reports of the *New York Times* and the jokes of ex-junkie/crackhead British comedians? Continetti does not say. Nor does he appear to show much interest in research that might be inconsistent with his demonological thesis.

Even a casual student of American politics will notice some rather odd omissions. For instance, in an entire book dedicated to the proposition than an evil conspiracy sought to brainwash the American people to believe that Palin was unready for office, I found no mention of the postelection admission by McCain campaign manager Rick Davis that his choice didn't have anything to do with Palin's qualifications for office because, as he said, "You've got to win first." Second, did you know that to this day Sarah Palin has never held a single full-fledged national press conference with actual professional political reporters?

Is this new generation of conservative journalists really this sloppy and lazy? You betcha… ■

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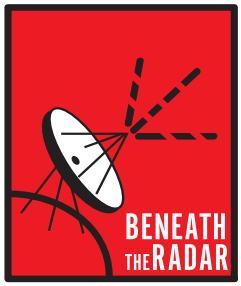
Gary Younge

Europe's Left: Not Dead Yet

"The facts speak only when the historian calls on them," wrote E.H. Carr in his landmark work *What Is History?* "It is he who decides which facts to give the floor and in what order or context." And so it is that, by giving a particular selection of "facts" the floor, distorting others and ignoring the rest that lie in clear view, an orthodoxy has emerged on this side of the Atlantic that the European left is in free fall.

"A specter is haunting Europe," reports the *New York Times*. "The specter of Socialism's slow collapse.... Where the left holds power, as in Spain and Britain, it is under attack. Where it is out, as in France, Italy and now Germany, it is divided and listless."

These stories (generally presented as news rather than opinion) are framed with considerable schadenfreude. At the very moment when capitalism is nose-diving, goes the punch line, so are those who are dedicated to replacing it.



"Among the victims of the Great Recession," observes the *Washington Post*, are "Europe's big-government, welfare-loving socialist parties, which so far have been unable to exploit voter anxiety over the perils of runaway capitalism."

"Pity Europe's Socialists," opines the *Boston Globe*. "Just when you might think capitalism's global crisis would breathe new life into the left, it's looking increasingly divided and tired." Tee-hee. The world as we know it is imploding, and nobody has any faith in an alternative.

Now, it's not that the facts that have been selected are untrue. A center-right coalition has just won in Germany, last year Silvio Berlusconi retained power in Italy and the year before that the French right won the presidency. Meanwhile, Labor faces almost certain defeat in Britain next spring. The four most populous countries in Europe with the four biggest economies are, or are about to be, controlled by the right. Moreover, at the recent European elections the social democratic grouping was drubbed. There is definitely a trend here. And it is by no means an encouraging one.

But it's only when you include another set of facts that you can see two reasons this year's elections reveal a trend that is less than calamitous for the left and two more reasons it is worrying for everybody. First, in four of the five other national elections in Europe this year (not counting the votes in small principalities and Albania), the right was defeated. In Portugal and Norway center-left governments were voted back in; in Iceland and Greece the left gained power. Only in Bulgaria did the right sweep the board.

Second, it depends what you mean by left. If you are talking about the British Labor Party, which has presided over growing inequalities, an increase in poverty and the Iraq War, or Germany's Social Democrats, who worked as coalition partners with the right to undermine workers' rights and slash welfare entitlements, then the left did do badly. But those aren't left policies. "Social Democrats in Europe have warned for years of the dangers of untamed markets and unchecked globalization," wrote the *Washington Post*. The truth is they have been embracing those policies heartily and are now being punished for it.

For at least the past decade the European social democrats have been distancing themselves from socialism. Everybody recognized that when they were winning; there is no good reason to stop doing so now.

But if you are talking about the hard left and the Greens—groups still advocating a radical redistribution of wealth and power—the results were impressive. In Germany the Greens and Die Linke, a blend of the remnants of the former East German Communist Party and left Social Democrats, each increased their share of the vote by more than 30 percent. Portugal's Left Bloc doubled its seats; in Iceland the Left-Green Movement increased its share of the vote by 52 percent, while in Greece the hard left and the Ecologist Greens upped their combined share slightly. (The Norwegian hard left fared poorly.)

So the specter haunting Europe isn't of socialism's "slow collapse." People haven't stopped looking for left alternatives to capitalism. In fact, those alternatives are more popular now than they have been for a long time. People have just stopped looking to the center-left to provide them. And while there are more supporters of the hard left or Greens than there were, usually a combined total of about one in five, in most instances there are simply not enough of them. But then that's always been the case.

Yet the two principal victors in this period of European politics have been neither the left nor the right but disillusionment and fragmentation.

In every country, with the exception of Iceland, there was a drop in voter turnout ranging from 2 percent in Norway to a whopping 9 percent in Germany. And in every country, with the exception of Norway, the share of the votes netted by the two main parties plunged by between 3 percent in Greece and 19 percent in Germany.

In other words, in a year of economic meltdown, growing unemployment and declining living standards, significantly fewer people are seeking electoral solutions. And those who *are* are increasingly abandoning the mainstream parties, prompting an even more striking rise on the hard right than there has been on the hard left. The margins rise, the mainstream falls, the whole is becoming less than the sum of its fragmented parts.

Disaffection, desperation, economic crisis, racial animus, rising nationalism—there is indeed a specter haunting Europe. It is all too familiar. Those who crow about it being an illustration of the demise of the left simply don't understand it. And that's a fact. ■

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THE OBAMA GENERATION, REVISITED

The 2008 election galvanized young voters and organizers. One year later, where are they?

by ELIZABETH MÉNDEZ BERRY

Not everyone at President Obama's healthcare rally at the University of Maryland on September 17 was as "fired up and ready to go" as he was. There were frat boys clowning around, students excited to see a president—any president—young men in matching T-shirts who were there solely because of their sheet metal workers union and one antiabortion activist with remarkable lungs. But it's safe to say that on that drizzly day, the Comcast Center was packed with 12,000 mostly young people who supported the president and his healthcare plan. As the marching band played "Copacabana" not once, not twice, but three times, student volunteers made sure the spectators—some of whom had lined up at 5:30 AM—stayed within the cordoned areas. Young women in HEALTHCARE '09 T-shirts craned to catch a glimpse of Obama, and after he finally emerged there was a cacophony of "I love you, Barack!"

On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama won 66 percent of voters under 30, increasing the Democratic share of the youth vote by 12 percent over 2004. Young people were among Obama's earliest and most important supporters; people under 30, for example, represented Obama's margin of victory in Iowa, the crucial first caucus. Rallies like this one, with thousands of young people putting their hands in the air for healthcare reform, are the most obvious indication of continuing youth enthusiasm for the president. Plenty in the crowd had volunteered for his campaign, including Eric Stehmer, 28, a University of Maryland graduate who has been unemployed for a year and has only catastrophic health coverage; Mouhamad Diabate, 21, a U of M student who canvassed for Obama and has several thousand dollars in medical bills that he's trying to ignore; and Chrisi West, 30, an enthusiastic Virginia "supervolunteer" whose parents lost their home when she was a child after her father got sick, and who seemed to know all the student volunteers from their work together on the campaign.

West had never touched politics before Obama, and now she's addicted, continuing to volunteer thirty-five hours a week for Organizing for America, the DNC group that grew out of the Obama campaign. The extraordinary impact of Obama's election on young people is not limited to supporting his legislative priorities. It's harder to measure than the audience at a rally, but the campaign is the reason, for example, a former professional cellist is now a union organizer and a former firefighter is an environmentalist. It galvanized a generation of first-time volunteers, and a year later many of them are still working for change they can believe in—which doesn't necessarily mean they're working for Obama himself.

In interviews with thirty young people around the country who worked on the Obama field campaign, almost all said that they continued their activism well after the endorphins of winning wore off. Obama has been called a rock star, but this group's experiences suggest that the campaign instilled a commitment to service, not a cult of personality. Though many former campaigners are still fans and several now work for the Obama administration, most are less interested in Washington politics than they are in community organizing. As former staffer Marcus Ryan, 25, says, "Once you turn on that community organizing perspective, it's hard to turn off."

According to experts and campaign veterans, the Obama for America field operation hooked its workers on organizing in a way never seen before. As former New Mexico staffer Elizabeth Kistin, 28, puts it, "The candidate gets people in the door, but it's the campaign that keeps them coming back." The Obama for America catchphrase was "Respect, Empower, Include," and the campaign offered young volunteers responsibility galore.

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Still, not every worker had the same transformative experience. By all accounts this was the most diverse presidential field campaign ever, but it was largely white, middle-class college graduates who had the time and means to move from swing state to swing state as volunteers. Many of them earned staff positions as a result. But despite its weaknesses, the campaign seems to have achieved the near impossible: making crunchy old community organizing sexy. The question is: what will these freshly minted young organizers do with their new skills?

After the election, about half of the thirty interviewees are in school or returned to their old jobs, but the lives of the other half completely changed. Four work for the administration, five started their own Washington nonprofit, two are full-time organizers, two are organizers in training and one joined Teach for America. Three who were at different stages of becoming lawyers now have other plans. The interviewees joined the campaign for many reasons: because they identified with Obama, because they were sick of complaining, because they were antiwar, because they wanted healthcare reform, because they felt guilty for not helping John Kerry, because they loved Michelle.

Campaign organizers emerged from victory into a full-blown recession, with high unemployment and a 21 percent decrease in internships.

Though most of them uprooted themselves and dedicated at least a month to the campaign, some integrated their activism into their everyday lives. Lana Wilson, 26, of New York, held a series of "Obamaerobics" fundraisers and sold BARACK YOUR BODY T-shirts to raise money for the campaign. Anthony Williams, 22, of Cincinnati, hired a white limousine to take people to the polls during a voter registration gig. Sgt. Mike Buchholz, 23, started a Soldiers for Obama Facebook group while he was in training at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

Longtime political observers are in awe of what Obama accomplished. "I spent most of my adult life where you say, Young people don't vote," says Democratic strategist Paul Maslin. "Now we have to throw aside those assumptions. That's a terrific thing. Obama took what we did with [Howard] Dean to new heights. People clicked in and clicked on. That activism can't be switched off easily."

Professor Peter Dreier of Occidental College, who trained workers during the campaign and teaches community organizing, says that the key change from previous presidential elections is the difference between marketing a product and activating a community. "This campaign was about building relationships among people that last beyond election day," he says. Partly because of the never-ending primary battle, Obama for America had offices in rural areas that had previously been ignored by candidates. In New Mexico, for example, the Obama campaign had thirty-nine offices in advance of the general election, compared with Kerry's sixteen in 2004. But beyond the many warm bodies, there was the strategy that empowered them.

While the Edwards and Clinton campaigns skipped young people in favor of reliable older voters, former youth director Hans Riemer poured resources into cultivating the youth of Iowa. His team developed the Barack Stars program, which targeted 17-year-olds who would be eligible to participate in the caucuses. "Our whole student program was run by volunteers," says Riemer, who previously worked for Rock the Vote. "Barack represents a thousand different answers to what young people were looking for," he says. "Who he is, his background, the issues he's worked on, his vision, his style." Riemer and other strategists developed a campaign climate that kept volunteers coming back. Field organizers around the country built comfy offices that became rec centers for young people.

To veteran activists used to running campaigns on a shoestring, Obama for America's volunteer-driven strategy wasn't rocket science, but it was breaking news to the establishment. Volunteers on most large-scale campaigns can expect to phone-bank or door-knock and not much else. But on the Obama campaign, they could be promoted to several key roles: team leader, campus captain, data coordinator, phone-bank captain or house party captain. The local field organizer would meet with a prospective volunteer one-on-one; this initial conversation usually involved storytelling, during which the staffer explained what brought him to the campaign and then asked the volunteer for her story. From there, he would ask her to commit to something: hosting a house party or recruiting other volunteers, for example.

"What was so remarkable about the Obama field campaign is that it took a leap of faith in ordinary people," says Zack Exley, the former organizing director for MoveOn.org and the Kerry campaign's online communications director. "For thousands and thousands of young people, it was the first big responsibility they took on." Nicole Derse, 31, the training director of Organizing for America, agrees. "Our success as a campaign depended on young people's leadership," she says. "At Penn State, we told our volunteers, 'If *you* don't organize your dorms, they're not going to get organized. If *you* don't get them registered to vote, they probably won't vote.' Young people aren't expected to do that."

While many staffers and volunteers speak of the excitement in the campaign offices, the work wasn't always fun. Zerlina Maxwell, 28, who took a year off from law school at Rutgers to work as a field organizer in Virginia, experienced the highs and lows. The high was Karl, a dedicated 89-year-old volunteer who arrived early for every Saturday-morning canvass. The low happened when she knocked on a door on a quiet street in Yorktown. "This woman said, Nigger, get off of my porch and take your shit with you!" says Maxwell. "She threw the literature back at me and slammed the door."

Maxwell wasn't the only young worker to experience racial tensions while working on the campaign for the first black president. Speaking off the record, many African-American staffers

Elizabeth Méndez Berry (mendezberry.com), an award-winning journalist, has written about culture and politics for publications like the Washington Post, *the* Village Voice *and* Vibe.

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and volunteers noted that the static wasn't just with belligerent voters. Some mention a lack of respect on the part of young white field organizers for fellow organizers or local volunteers, some of whom had much more experience. In some states, white field organizers were sent into any and all communities, but black organizers worked only in African-American areas.

Others were frustrated by the weaknesses of the campaign's mostly young, inexperienced staff. Obamaerobics instructor Lana Wilson volunteered in Toledo, Ohio, for six weeks before the election and wasn't entirely sold. "They had limitless energy and enthusiasm," she says. "But they had no office experience and no experience delegating tasks or making people feel appreciated. I thought, There'll be an arrogant generation of people saying, 'I worked on the Obama campaign.'"

Wilson needn't worry too much about their egos. Though some campaign staffers now work for the administration or nonprofits, it turns out that in this economy a year as a field organizer isn't the résumé boost some may have hoped for. Young organizers emerged from victory into a full-blown recession, with high unemployment, huge cuts in the nonprofit sector and a 21 percent decrease in internships nationwide. Much of the scaffolding for civic engagement and the entry-level positions that come with it had shrunk or disappeared.

Plenty of former staffers went back to previous gigs or enrolled in grad school, but some faced bleaker prospects. According to Demond Drummer, 26, a field organizer during the primaries in South Carolina, one of his most dedicated volunteers was a high school student who got to chair a meeting with Obama's sister. That young man had a history of discipline problems in school, and he is now behind bars (Drummer's not sure why); he will be out this month. "He's a leader, but he had nothing else to do after the election," says Drummer. In Kansas City, Missouri, where he lives, Exley sees former superstar field organizers working at coffee shops.

Exley, whose New Organizing Institute offered fellowships to several former field organizers, including Drummer, believes that Obama campaign veterans represent an extraordinary talent pool for the progressive movement. "On the right, they always suck up talent after elections to keep them warm and employed with healthcare until the next campaign," he says. "I think [progressive] groups didn't understand that the experience of being an Obama field organizer was something special and enriching, because on other campaigns people didn't really get much out of it. In most places, the Kerry field campaign didn't give young staff or volunteers a disciplined, accountable experience. The Obama field campaign was in most places an incredible work experience for young people."

Absent any systematic attempts to recruit them, hundreds of Obama campaign vets flocked to Washington in hopes of finding work in the administration or the many nonprofits headquartered there. Many remained unemployed as the administration's hiring process dragged on: after working for months with no days off, they found themselves on an extended unpaid vacation in an expensive city, draining their savings accounts.

Some who survived the long wait were rewarded with

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administration jobs. Hallie Montoya Tansey, 29, known for her work as field director for the League of Young Voters, joined the Obama campaign early and was a deputy field director in Wisconsin for the general election. She's now a confidential assistant to the chief of staff of the education secretary.

At *The Nation*'s request, Montoya Tansey compiled a list of 101 young staffers and dedicated volunteers she'd met while on the Obama field campaign. Their current occupations offer some insight into where field campaign grads have gone since the election. Of the 101 she profiled, about 70 had never worked on a political campaign before. Since the campaign, sixty-three have found jobs within the administration and its many departments. A former drug and alcohol counselor works for the Office of Drug Control Policy; a former producer on MTV's *The Hills* was hired as a data manager at the DNC. Another nine have taken jobs on new campaigns or with elected officials. Others are back in school, unemployed, working for nonprofits or waiting tables. (Montoya Tansey's sample is consistent with reports from other former field organizers.)

Since the election, two of the thirty campaigners I spoke with have worked on Organizing for America's campaign for healthcare, and another, Nicole Derse, has a role in running it. Marianne von Nordeck, 29, is a former concert cellist who'd never participated in politics before. She was mentored by Derse during the primaries in Massachusetts and New Hampshire—"Nicole totally changed my life," says von Nordeck—and went on to work as the field director of a State Senate campaign in the general election. She now works as a healthcare organizer for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), a union with 1.6 million members nationwide. Von Nordeck went a year without asthma inhaler refills because she had no health insurance, so the issue resonated with her.

"I couldn't go back to what I did before," she says. "We didn't all drop what we were doing and change our lives just because we liked Obama. We wanted to move the country forward." Of the nineteen campaign coordinators AFSCME hired last spring to work on healthcare reform, fifteen are Obama campaign veterans.

Not all of the former field campaign workers have von Nordeck's zest for policy change, but even if they're not active community organizers, several hope to return to organizing as soon as they can get jobs in the field. Many interviewees emphasized that the campaign gave them a new sense of community.

DC's New Green Shoots

At the top of a row house in Washington's Dupont Circle is a cramped office filled with enthusiastic young people and computers. The only decorations are marker-drawn charts: work plans and contact lists. There's a small balcony that's used for smoke breaks and interviews with potential interns. It could be a political campaign's headquarters, and in a way it is: it's the office of DC Project, a fledgling environmental nonprofit founded by five twentysomething Obama volunteers and their ex-firefighter friend.

DC Project's goal is to connect people trained in green technology with demand for that technology by using tactics its founders learned on the ground in states like Michigan, Florida and New Hampshire during the 2008 campaign. Marcus Ryan, 25, worked as a regional field director in Florida and moved to DC after the election with a fellow former Tatanka Hotshots firefighter, John Lauer, 25. They connected with DC's largest homeless shelter, the Community for Creative Non-Violence, and held roundtable meetings to assess the needs of those hardest hit by the recession. That research informed conversations at their Takoma Park apartment with Kristen Psaki, 24, who had connected with Ryan on the trail in Florida. "We were sitting on the floor, drinking Red Bull, talking about how to change the world," she says. It was there that they developed the idea of DC Project. Psaki, who moved to Washington to pursue a job in the administration, decided to remain on the outside instead.

The organization was incorporated in May. Currently, it's focused on Weatherize DC, which "utilizes the community-based field methods of the Obama for America campaign to conquer market barriers and spur homeowner investment in weatherization." The project hopes to weatherize 200 DC homes by March 2010.

Executive director Will Byrne, 25, is from Massachusetts and finished the campaign as the regional field director in Lansing, Michigan. "The campaign changed my worldview completely," he says. "It showed me that bottom-up, grassroots organizing could change the world. It taught me how to listen, not how to talk." The group now has nine full-time staffers, nine campus fellows and more than 200 volunteers at five college campuses in the capital region.

For Max Harper, 26, joining DC Project represented a happy ending to a bumpy post-campaign period. An environmentalist and video producer who'd been a "Swiss Army knife" on the campaign's new-media team, he worked for the Obama transition team after the election. He was broke but moved to DC and took a volunteer position nonetheless, crashing on friends' couches. When the transition period ended, he says, "It was radio silence. You didn't know if you should talk about being in the administration. It was frustrating not to activate that energy." In the end, he reconnected with Psaki, whom he knew from the campaign, and joined the DC Project team.

"Our hypothesis is that young people want to do more than advocate; they want to organize," says Lauer. During one three-hour stretch, five young volunteers stopped by the office. During a recent field blitz, fifty-five volunteers went door to door pitching weatherization as a way to save money. "We identify a leader in the community—maybe someone who weatherized their own home," says Psaki. "It's much more powerful coming from a neighbor." —E.M.B.

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That's true for Mike Jones, 20, a sophomore at New York University. Jones was one of the young superstars of the primary season; he fundraised in order to volunteer for the campaign ("Working for free is very expensive," he says) and was eventually hired as a field organizer. He worked in Nevada, Texas and his home state, North Carolina—all while he still had braces on his teeth. "If I had emerged from the campaign with only a reinforced political ideology I would have been missing the point," says Jones. "Before, I didn't think of community as an instrument for achieving." Over the years, Jones's sense of community has been shaky. Because of his parents' financial difficulties, he spent high school in a Christian group home called Crossnore, which supported him financially during the campaign as well as in college.

Jones received an undergraduate research grant from NYU that he's now using to invest in the community he left behind. He interviews young residents of group homes in California, New Jersey and North Carolina about how they construct their personal histories despite their transient lives. It's a skill he developed on the campaign during those crucial one-on-one meetings with volunteers. "It was the experience of sharing a personal narrative with a complete stranger that laid the foundation for the organizing," he says.

It's clear that the Obama campaign has had a striking impact on the paths of young people who had never been involved in politics before. Until November 2007, Marcus Ryan was a firefighter with the Tatanka Hotshots in South Dakota. When he heard Obama's speech during the New Hampshire primary, he says, "The hairs raised on the back of my neck. I realized something's happening in America, and you either answer that call or you don't." The 25-year-old joined the Obama campaign as a volunteer in Texas. By the time of the general election, he was on staff as the regional field director in Miami. On November 4, after the election had been called for Obama, Ryan strategized with fellow campaign workers over rum and Cokes about how to use green jobs to fight poverty. Soon after, he and several other young Obama veterans came up with the DC Project, which aims to generate demand for green jobs [see "DC's New Green Shoots," page 17]. "It's more exciting now, because the campaign was a promise of what was possible," he says. "And now we're trying to make sure that promise is granted."

Caroline Gibbons, 22, had never voted before; she was eli-

Obama for America's Gallup Pol

Nadine Padilla, 25, had been doing get-out-the-vote work for the Native American Voters Alliance for two years when she was recruited by the Obama campaign, which was looking for Navajo organizers in New Mexico. She'd been an Obama fan since his 2004 DNC speech, and in August 2008 she took a position as field organizer for McKinley County, a rural area an hour from where she grew up.

"I showed up at headquarters, and the state director said, 'You need to open an office…. This is what you're gonna do. Go do it,'" Padilla recalls. She drove to Gallup, a border town of some 20,000 whites, Native Americans and Latinos. At a coffee shop she fundraised from local Democratic donors to pay the deposit on an office, and opened up shop in a space with big glass windows on Main Street.

For a while, Padilla was lonely in there—locals were skeptical about participating. "Some people would say, 'Why should I even vote? I have my own government,'" she recounts. (The Navajo nation has its own sovereign government.) But gradually, by conducting one-on-one meetings, Padilla developed a team of 130 volunteers. She says that the vast majority were working on a campaign for the first time, and most were under 30. Gallup has a small University of New Mexico campus, which turned out some college-age volunteers, and local high school students also signed up.

Padilla dropped phone sheets off in remote rural areas for less mobile volunteers. She also created a supervised kids' area at the office so parents could phone-bank. The office became like a community center, with a front area where people drank coffee, listened to music and chatted. The challenge was to move them to the back, where the phone-banking and data entry happened. But by the end of the campaign, Padilla's team was working nonstop—some volunteers were even sleeping in the office.

On election day the hard work paid off. "The volunteers did it themselves. They had come such a long way," she says. "On the first day, they were like, 'What do you want me to do? Talk to somebody about voting?' to being able to run the entire day themselves. I just brought them coffee."

On November 4 McKinley County had the highest increase in voter turnout in the state—36 percent—and Obama won it handily. Some of the volunteers are now preparing to campaign for a state representative candidate. For Padilla, that's the most gratifying part of her experience. "On the campaign we always said, 'Work yourself out of a job,'" she says. "Pass on these skills so that when you leave they'll have those tools for whatever they want."

Padilla has stayed in close touch with the volunteers, and she's helping them strategize for the state campaign. After the election, though she was tempted by DC, Padilla decided to stay close to home. "I always knew I was needed on the reserve," she says. Today she uses some of the skills she developed on the campaign in her role as a community organizer against uranium mining in northwestern New Mexico, where mining has created radioactive waste that continues to cause health problems like cancer. Padilla is the sole paid organizer for Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment, a coalition of volunteer-run groups, some of which are fighting new mining-company proposals while others work against soil contamination. It's a daunting issue that has affected her community for decades, which is why she took the gig. "I was inspired to take this job after the Obama campaign, because I had this feeling that anything was possible," she says.

—E.M.B.

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gible in 2004 but didn't change her registration from Queens, where she grew up, to the Bronx, where she was studying at Fordham University. "I'm very liberal and outspoken, but I thought of elections as something for the wealthy and well connected," she says. That changed her senior year. She'd been a fan of Obama's since his 2004 DNC speech, and starting in the fall of 2007 she registered voters on street corners. After graduating, she forfeited her law school deposit and accepted a Teach for America position instead. "I thought I'd be a hypocrite if I took the 'When in doubt, be a lawyer,' route," she says. In August 2008 Gibbons started as a second grade teacher in Coahoma County, a poor area in the Mississippi Delta. She changed her registration and drove people to the polls on November 4; the county went 73 percent for Obama. "My students think he's the best president we've ever had," she says. "Teaching is one way the momentum I felt from the campaign is actually carried out, day to day. These kids can keep it going."

Some of the first-time volunteers are like Chrisi West: still behind Obama 100 percent—she phone-banks and campaigns for healthcare with Organizing for America at the same farmers' markets she visited before the election, on top of her full-time job at a nonprofit. But others have been disappointed by the president on issues like civil liberties, the Iraq War, the presence of usual suspect lobbyists or because of the way the White House handled the Van Jones case. For Arizonan Jake Harvey, 20, who dedicated much of his freshman and sophomore years at Northern Arizona University to the field campaign, it's gay rights.

Almost a year after the election, Harvey, who was diagnosed in April with leukemia, has mixed feelings about Obama's presidency. "I still have a box of campaign gear and newspaper clippings from 2007 that I will one day share with my children, grandchildren and the students I teach," he says. "But now that he's been in office for nine months, I've become a little more cynical. As a gay person, I am holding him to the fire to deliver."

Before the election, Harvey wasn't in the legislative loop. He is now, and as soon as he's recovered from chemo, he plans to get more involved in gay rights organizations focusing on issues like "don't ask, don't tell" and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Like everyone interviewed for this article, Harvey had his own reasons for devoting a year to Obama. But though the interviewees' priorities are different, the skills they developed are similar, as is the sense that they can organize communities to win.

This is the "Yes We Can" generation. Working on the Obama field campaign has given them an unrestrained, sometimes naïve optimism, and if Obama indoctrinated them with anything, it's a belief in the power of civic engagement. Some plan to use the tools they learned to hold the man they elected accountable. More want to advance their own issues on their own terms. But none of them want to be Associate No. 27 at a corporate law firm. They're just hoping somebody notices and offers them a job. ■

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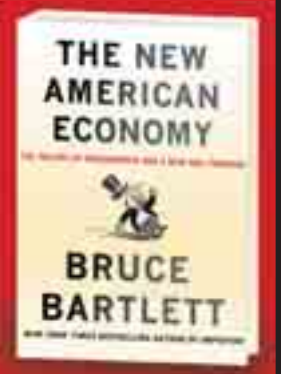

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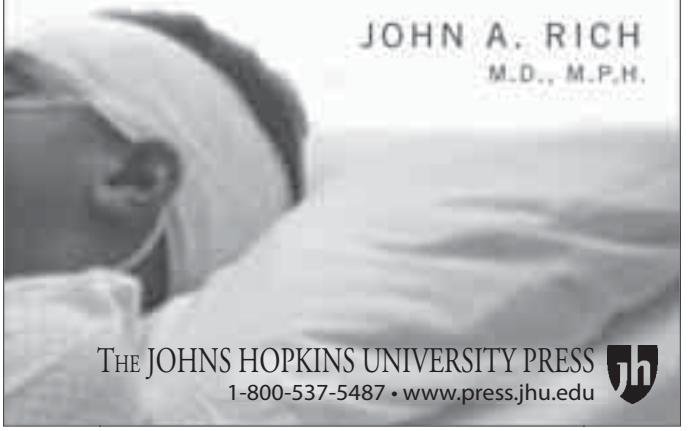

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Back to the USSA

The country's oldest student association has its eyes on the prize—student aid reform.

by TE-PING CHEN

Among the Washington-based passel of higher-education lobbyists—universities, banks and student lenders—the United States Students Association (USSA) is an anomaly: a student-run organization advocating for students. Tucked away just north of fastidious K Street, its office has the motley feel of a college dorm, if an exceedingly well-organized one. Whiteboards cataloging their goals ("Retweets—30 by the 27th!") in careful grids line the offices, where a newly ensconced, ebullient staff of ten make plans and take calls.

Founded in 1947, USSA has a vivid, tumultuous history: one that spans infiltration by the CIA and organizing on everything from civil rights in Atlanta to the war in Vietnam. The group has been the training ground for generations of activists and leaders, including Tom Hayden, Representative Barney Frank and Democratic strategist Donna Brazile. Though it has rarely been at the vanguard of the student left, its history closely tracks the down-to-brass-tacks trend in post-1990s student activism. In recent decades USSA has stepped away from gauzy declarations of belief on all matters foreign and domestic, and instead defined itself as a ground-level, policy-savvy organization bent on advocating one goal: increased access to higher education.

And following Obama's election, USSA is starting to feel like it's in the driver's seat.

"Right now, our challenge is to persuade other millennials that we no longer have to fight for crumbs," says USSA president Gregory Cendana, who was elected in July at USSA's most recent gathering. "It's a time to really ask ourselves, What do we want from our elected officials?"

Of course, the challenge USSA's members have laid out for themselves is steeper than that: overhaul the student lending system and pass the DREAM Act—granting undocumented students who pursue higher education a path to permanent residency—and all in just the next twelve months. Both are heavily embattled measures that have stumbled in Congress for years.

But that's not slowing USSA down. Nationwide, USSA claims a membership of 4.5 million students on campuses that have elected to join through their student governments, which pay dues and help frame policy. Since 2006 membership has doubled—in part reflecting a growing strength in the state-based student organizations that form USSA's spine.

Though USSA was once known for publishing thick booklets containing an A-to-Z platform, the organization has narrowed its sights to advocate more strictly for student aid. Between 1982 and 2007, the costs of college fees and tuition rose by 439 percent. Last year, the average debt for graduating seniors who took out student loans ballooned to $23,200, up 24 percent since just 2004. Meanwhile, Pell Grants—once the keystone of federal student aid—which covered more than 80 percent of the cost of a public four-year education in the 1970s, today cover only 35 percent.

JAKE STILWELL, USSA

Jelisa Difo, of the University of Massachusetts, speaks at a rally for financial aid reform.

Like other student advocates, USSA is hoping that the new administration—even beset by two wars and an economic crisis—can help reverse the tide. Obama's stimulus package, for example, contained a massive $115 billion infusion into state education budgets, as well as into Pell Grants, tuition tax credits and other programs. While the funds haven't stanched ongoing layoffs in the education field (including 143,000 in the past five months alone), the measure represents the government's largest-ever single investment in education.

What's more, the White House has been unafraid to take on an issue that has stymied Congress in years past: subsidies for student lenders. Out of the $66 billion borrowed in federal loans during the 2007-08 school year, about 80 percent was disbursed through banks and private lenders that participate in the Federal Family Education Loan program. Critics of FFEL note that by assuming private lenders' risks, the government is inflating their profits on the taxpayers' dime. Obama backs eliminating FFEL in favor of lending directly from the Treasury, bypassing the private middleman—a measure previously championed by Senator Ted Kennedy, and one the Congressional Budget Office says could save $47 billion to $87 billion over the next ten years.

Te-Ping Chen is a writer living in Washington, DC. Her work has appeared in outlets such as Le Soir, *the* Providence Phoenix *and the* South China Morning Post.

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Recent public revelations about how the system has bred too-cozy relationships—and kickbacks—between lenders seeking preferential access and campus financial aid officers have given such reform efforts greater vigor. In September the House voted to end FFEL by approving the Student Aid and Financial Responsibility Act (SAFRA), a bill that calls for any savings to be reinvested in community colleges and other education programs, including $40 billion for Pell Grants and $10 billion to pay down the deficit. USSA, along with groups like Campus Progress and USPIRG, strongly backs the measure, which is expected to face a more contentious vote in the Senate.

After all, student lenders aren't giving up without a fight. Over the past year and a half, Sallie Mae (for which participation in FFEL accounts for one-third of its income) has spent some $5.8 million to lobby against Obama's plan, enlisting powerhouse lobbyist shops like the Podesta Group to sink Democratic support for it. To date, Democratic senators such as Arlen Specter (Sallie Mae is based in Pennsylvania), Jeff Bingaman, Tom Udall and Ben Nelson (Nebraska is home to student lender Nelnet, Nelson's top campaign contributor) have all expressed opposition to the measure.

'Right now, our challenge is to persuade other millennials that we no longer have to fight for crumbs.'—Gregory Cendana, USSA president

USSA's other legislative priority, the DREAM Act, is unlikely to be heard this fall, but Hill staffers say that the measure may be broached in the spring as part of a broader immigration reform package.

Against this backdrop, USSA has turned out the one resource it can count on: its base. In early October, as part of Raising Pell, a weeklong campaign to support SAFRA, students made more than 1,200 phone calls to senators. Since May, USSA students have lobbied 150 members of Congress in direct meetings. The group also retains a full-time lobbyist and has worked to cultivate close ties with Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other key legislators, conducting joint press conferences and rallies.

Of course, as Barmak Nassirian of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers notes, for members of Congress it's easy for USSA to "very quickly turn into a prop—warm and fuzzy and positive but without substantive influence." That said, Nassirian thinks USSA's presence "scares the bejesus out of the opposition, because they're reminders of what's really at stake here: students, not lenders." In recent legislative sessions, USSA students have testified at hearings and served on various rule-making teams at the Education Department, including a rule-making committee working on lender regulations in the Higher Education Opportunity Act this past spring.

The USSA may be outgunned, and its leadership frequently in flux: the DC-based staff turns over every two years. But for students seeking direct representation in Washington, says Nassirian, there simply isn't anyone else like USSA at the table.

Outside Washington, says Paul Loeb, a historian who's worked to chronicle student activism, one of USSA's functions is less obvious but still crucial: tuning students in to DC policy movements that might otherwise dodge public scrutiny. Campus "administrations aren't out there telling students what's going on, and the media isn't covering it," says Loeb.

Victor Sánchez, a senior at UC, Santa Cruz, and president of the University of California Students Association, agrees. "Without USSA, we wouldn't have the information to effectively organize on student issues," he says.

USSA faces internal challenges: its student government–based model of membership, for one, has liabilities. Not all students counted as members are aware of their campus's affiliation, and occasionally the group attracts censure for seeming too remote. At the same time, though, historian Angus Johnston—who recently completed a dissertation on USSA—argues that USSA's structure is mostly a virtue. "In the '60s, folks could read about SDS in *Newsweek* and just declare themselves a chapter," he says. And while SDS self-immolated in the late 1960s, says Johnston, "USSA remains accountable to a specific membership, who pay dues and have a real stake in its future."

In the meantime, USSA's tighter legislative focus on student aid has helped minimize infighting over political identity, which straddles a diverse, sometimes fractious constituency. During the organization's National Student Congress in 2008, conservative delegates from the University of North Carolina Association of Student Governments were booed for opposing internal rules that require a certain number of campus delegates to be female, minority, working class or queer. "We didn't feel terribly welcome," says T. Greg Doucette, a recent North Carolina graduate. (The group withdrew from USSA earlier this year, citing financial as well as political concerns.)

At USSA's National Student Congress in July, though, the group's top legislative priorities—SAFRA and the DREAM Act—were passed by delegates with unanimous consent, something almost unprecedented in the group's history. "We're working hard to build collective power across all our campuses," says Lindsay McCluskey, USSA's current vice president. "That includes conservative as well as liberal students."

As someone who grew up in an overwhelmingly Republican town in Minnesota, Josh Mann, a senior at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, says his experience with USSA is a testimonial to "how the organization can really change people." Before he joined USSA, he says, he'd never been politically active, but his involvement—he's been both a board member and an advocate for the past three years—has been "eye-opening."

"Sometimes it's not until you have the opportunity to get involved with a group like USSA that you see what power you can have," he says. Mann says that after he graduates he wants to keep working for USSA: first as a staffer in DC, then someday as an elected official. ■

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Generation Recession

Young people have lost 2.5 million jobs to the crisis, making them the hardest-hit age group.

by LIZZY RATNER

JANNA BROWER

When David Thyme was an even younger man than he is today, his fantasies of early adulthood did not include a 9:30 PM curfew and a bed in Covenant House, a shelter for homeless youth. Then again, they also didn't include a recession so severe that his financially strapped father would ask him to help with rent—or that when he couldn't find an entry-level job to do so, his father would ask him to leave home. "He was like, Son, you got to do what you got to do. I can't have you in my house," recalled the thin-faced 18-year-old from the Bronx.

Shawn Bolden, an earnest 23-year-old from Harlem, also nursed a different vision of his youthful years. A graduate of Monroe College with a degree in criminal justice, he imagined dedicating his days to nurturing the minds of the next generation of neglected students, doing his part to solder shut the school-to-prison pipeline. But since losing his job teaching arts and college prep at a local nonprofit in June, he's been struggling to find his way back into the classroom, all the while worrying about feeding his newborn daughter.

And then there's Charles Channon. A 25-year-old graduate of George Washington University, he dreamed that his post-college days would be devoted to an onward-and-upward career with an international development firm—or at least a job with which to pay off $65,000 in college debt. "I wouldn't pretend that there's absolutely no conceit in me, but I do want to get out there and make the best difference I can," he said.

So much for youthful fantasies.

These are not happy days for America's young and striving. Indeed, as the economy has rocked and tumbled its way through 2009, spewing jobs like a sea-sick tourist, these have become very, very bad days. In September, the unemployment rate for people between the ages of 16 and 24 hovered morosely at 18.1 percent, nearly double the national average for that month. At the same time, the actual employment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds dropped to a startling 46 percent, the grimmest such figure on record since 1948, the year the government began keeping track. Taken together, this same group of young people has lost more than 2.5 million jobs since the economy began deflating in December 2007, roughly one-third of all the jobs lost, making them the hardest-hit age group of the recession.

And it gets bleaker. Bad as the youth unemployment numbers are, the underemployment numbers are even more distressing, with young people once again taking the hit. During the second quarter of 2009, for instance, the underemployment rate for workers under 25 was an alarming 31.9 percent; for workers between 25 and 34 the underemployment rate was 17.1 percent.

All of which suggests that for all this country's unbridled fascination with the glories of youth; for all the teen-lusting TV dramas, wunderkind "it" kids and peewee tech moguls, to say nothing of all the industries built on making the rest of us look and feel teen-queen young—being a member of today's youth explosion isn't a particularly enviable position after all.

"Young people under 30 have been far more affected than other groups in the economy during the recession," says Andrew Sum, professor of economics and director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. "And the younger you are, the worse off you've been."

The reasons for this are multiple and complex, but perhaps the one that young people cite most is their desperate new job competition: adults twice their age with college degrees and decades of experience are now applying for entry-level positions. Moreover, those young people lucky enough to have found work often fall prey to the old "last hired, first fired" syndrome, putting them right back where they started. The result is that young people are not only working less than at any time since the Great Depression but could suffer the consequences deep into their individual and collective futures.

"These effects are long-lasting; they're not short and measly-lasting," explains Sum, citing several studies suggesting that a slow employment start can have long-term consequences. In the case of white male college graduates, for instance, an influential study showed that for as long as fifteen years after college, those who graduated into the recession-rocked economy of the early 1980s earned less than those who graduated into a sunny employment market. Equally disturbing: those who work only part time when younger, as so many young people must now do, see little benefit to their future wages compared with those working full time.

"We are throwing out of the labor market those kids who will benefit the most from the work experience they get, and they will lose that for the rest of their lives," Sum warns. "That's why it really is a depression for young workers. And I don't use that word lightly."

This was not the graduation party that most young folks imagined when they daydreamed about their liberation into early adulthood. It's certainly not the champagne-and-streamers rager that millennial boosters and other youth gurus anticipated when they dashed off all those messianic star charts predicting that this new wave of young folks would usher in the

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next epoch of dreamers and do-gooder types: the next Great Generation.

And yet, bleak as the current climate is, the story behind the statistics is also far more complicated—and, in some ways, uglier—than many of the recent apocalyptic pronouncements about a "lost generation" and "dead end kids" would suggest (see *BusinessWeek*'s October 19 cover story and the September 27 *New York Post*, if you dare). Certainly there are scads of lost young souls roaming the aisles of job fairs, cluttering unemployment offices and weighing whether it's more important to pay the electricity or the phone bill. But in this generation of 80-odd million, some people are far more lost than others, while some have the luxury of not being lost at all. Quite simply, the real danger of the recession is not necessarily a lost generation of unemployed millennials so much as a Swiss cheese generation where the places once occupied by the least affluent—particularly the least affluent people of color—have simply been carved out.

"I hope people are really clear that this is not an equal-opportunity recession, that it's hurting the weakest," says Dedrick Muhammad, senior organizer and research associate for the Institute for Policy Studies Program on Inequality and the Common Good, who has done extensive research on the recession's disparate, and decidedly racial, impact on the people of this country.

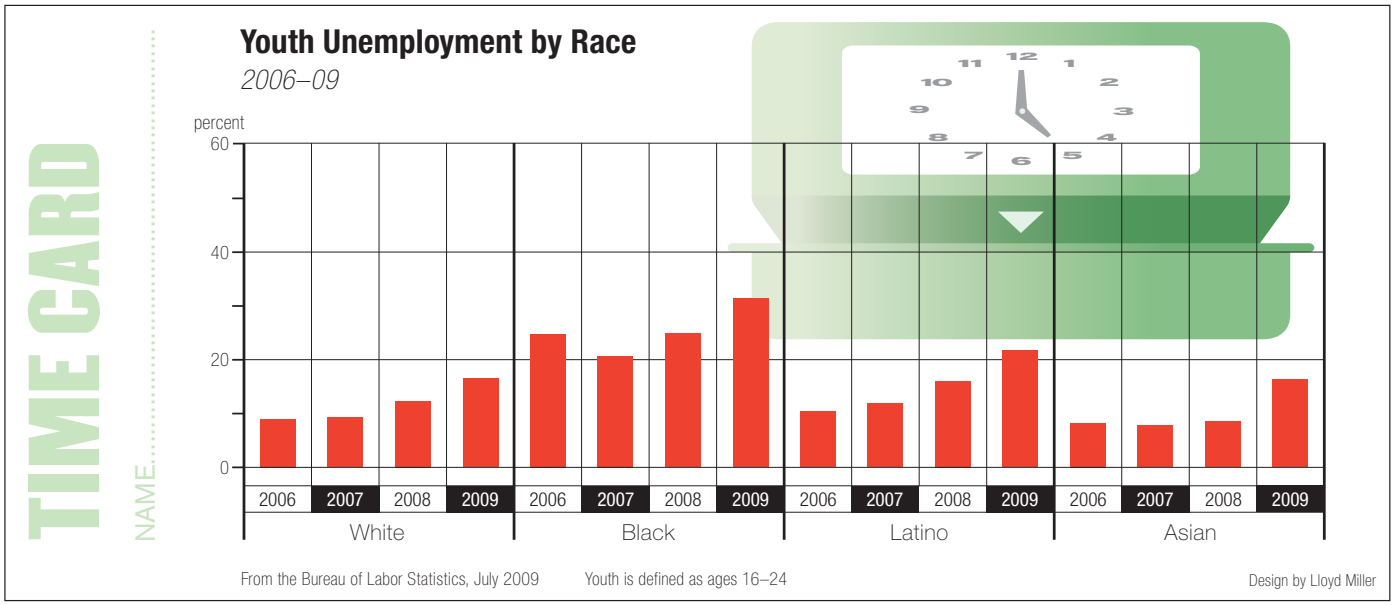
Once again, the data help tell the story. As reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in early October, young African-American teens between the ages of 16 and 19 have an unemployment rate of 40.7 percent, while young Latinos of the same age are unemployed at a rate of nearly 30 percent—both drastically higher than the 23 percent unemployment experienced by their white peers. Among 20- to 24-year-olds, the disparity is even more dramatic: while young white workers in their early 20s have an unemployment rate of 13.1 percent, their African-American compatriots are unemployed at the rate of 27.1 percent, more than twice as high.

Or as Sum summarizes, "If you are both low-income and black or low-income and Hispanic, you have lost the most. And if you are young, affluent and a woman, in terms of just labor market studies, you've done OK… although across the board everybody has lost."

These losses have stacked up quickly, but today's great youth crisis didn't happen overnight, the sudden result of an immaculate recession. For young workers—and in particular young, low-income and workers of color—the struggle began long ago, with the changes that began refashioning the economy as far back as the 1980s: the decline of unions; the long, slow death of manufacturing; the rise of the service economy; and the near-total disappearance of proactive government policy. The last decade in particular, with its post-dot-com recession followed by a jobless youth recovery, has been particularly bruising.

The result of all this has been that many of today's young people—again, especially the poor, those with less education and people of color—have a measurably harder road to travel than their generational elders, according to "The Economic State of Young America," a report published in spring 2008 by Demos, a New York–based research and advocacy organization. Between 1975 and 2005, for instance, the typical annual income for workers between the ages of 25 and 34 decreased across all educational brackets, with the exception of women with bachelor's degrees. Men without a high school diploma suffered most, their annual income plummeting by 34.2 percent, while men with a high school diploma or the equivalent earned the runner-up slot, with an income drop of 28.5 percent. As for women, those with less than a high school diploma, as well as those possessing just a diploma, lost less ground than their male counterparts; but then again, they're still doing worse than before and, perhaps more to the point, they still fare significantly worse than men their age.

At the same time, today's young workers have had to do more with less. College tuition rates have skyrocketed—in fact, rates



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for four-year public universities have more than doubled since 1980—with the unsurprising result that nearly two-thirds of students graduating from four-year colleges in 2008 left in debt. The cost of childcare now eats up as much as 10 percent of a two-parent family's income in many states (as much as 14.3 percent in Oregon). And young people between the ages of 19 and 34 are the most likely population to be uninsured—not because they don't want health benefits but because employers don't offer them. A case in point: 63.3 percent of recent high school graduates had employer-provided healthcare in 1979, whereas just 33.7 percent had it in 2004.

"What we're looking at is a situation where young people entered the recession already feeling the brunt of thirty years' worth of pretty gradual but nonetheless dramatic economic and social changes," says Nancy Cauthen, director of the Economic Opportunity Program at Demos. "The recession just made a bad situation worse."

Thankfully, there's something of a pewter lining surrounding all this bleakness: not only are certain swaths of this generation among the most politically engaged in decades but the generation's politics in general trend decidedly toward the progressive. Indeed, many young people have already begun coming together, in protest and coalition-style advocacy, to push for everything from green jobs to increased bank regulation to state budgets that aren't balanced on students' backs (thank you, University of California protesters!).

This is promising, since the list of much-needed solutions to young people's recession problems is long and daunting—beginning, many researchers agree, with the need to create more jobs: green jobs, Job Corps jobs, public works jobs, even tax credit–induced jobs. However, these can't be just any old jobs; they must be jobs targeted toward young people, jobs for which employers are induced to hire the youthful, inexperienced and most vulnerable, because, as Sum says, "Very few kids are being hired by the stimulus." His solution: pull them into the workforce either through direct job creation, partial subsidies or targeted tax credits to youth-hiring businesses. Moreover, he advises, these jobs also must last longer than a brief six- to twelve-week summer fling. That's how long the roughly 284,000 summer youth jobs funded by the stimulus lasted, even though there is almost no evidence that a quickie summer job has any lingering effect on a young person's long-term prospects—though there is evidence that summer jobs that extend into longer-term employment help quite a bit, according to Sum.

But above all, these new jobs have to be far more plentiful and ambitious in scope than the ones created thus far, not the least because it will take years for the country to crawl out of the vast employment hole, roughly 10.7 million jobs deep, created by this recession. And while 284,000 summer youth jobs certainly represent an important start, they not only don't meet the current need but seem downright piddling compared with the nearly 1 million government-sponsored summer youth jobs that existed during the late 1970s.

"This is classic of Obama's situation: Obama can double something or increase it 100 percent from the previous administration, but it's still so insignificant to the problem," explains Dedrick Muhammad. By contrast, he observes, "Wall Street's booming because the government took seriously their problems and did a massive intervention."

Of course, even if a slew of youth jobs materialized overnight, it would only be the beginning, since, as Cauthen cautions, "the recession could end tomorrow and that's not necessarily going to mean a bright future for young people." For that, she and others have argued, this generation needs more systemic, probing change, including easier access to the protection of unions in the form of the Employee Free Choice Act, more affordable health insurance in the form of universal health coverage, childcare that doesn't decimate their paychecks. And that's just for starters. With these policies in place, the rising generation still has a chance at the starry future that's been predicted for it. Without them, well, just imagine the way things are now—and then extrapolate.

Two recent events in New York City illustrate the way the world is trending for two very different groups of young people—the young and bailed-out versus the young and bailed-on. The first took place amid the brick-and-ivy greenery of Columbia University, in the world of the bailed-out. It was mid-September, and several hundred college students had packed into the school's Faculty House for an intimate evening with a team of Goldman Sachs recruiters. A year earlier, these recruiters probably seemed like a dying species, a herd of expensively dressed mastodons taking their valedictory spin, while the sober-suited students must have looked almost pitiable. But on this evening, the recruiters looked very much alive—downright brash—as they wooed the standing-room-only crowd of eager if anxious-looking students. Clutching brochures that urged them to "make the most of your talent," these students listened in unblinking awe as the recruiters spoke of their bank's "competitive advantage," its "global impact," the golden "opportunity" that awaited all Goldman employees, old and young.

In 1979, 63.3 percent of recent high school graduates had employer-provided healthcare. By 2004, only 33.7 percent did.

And in case the students missed the point, there was a promotional video, starring a comely squad of young analysts (all programmed, it seemed, to repeat the word "unique!"), that ended with the cultish mantra, "I believe, I believe, I believe in Goldman Sachs." It was as if it were 2006, not 2009, as if the good old days of overpaid young analysts with Town Cars and expense accounts were back again—which, thanks to the government, they essentially are.

"If you do well and you're ambitious, you really can do well," a handsome young trader of mortgage-backed securities promised a throng of students who'd gathered around him for advice.

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Meanwile, several weeks earlier, in a part of town not touched by bank bailouts, a very different scene played itself out in a Covenant House conference room. There, nine homeless New Yorkers between the ages of 18 and 20—among them, David Thyme—huddled around a table topped with pizza and soda and shared their failed attempts at finding a job. All of them wanted one, but none had managed to find one despite months of scratching at the closed doors of just about every fast-food, retail and service joint in town. According to Jerome Kilbane, Covenant House New York's executive director, the organization's job training program has placed 40 percent fewer young people over the past year.

"It's kind of discouraging when you go out and you come back empty-handed every day," said Samantha, a serious-faced 19-year-old who dreams of becoming a physical therapist someday but is currently so strapped for cash she can barely afford a MetroCard to look for a job.

"I feel if I had a job I wouldn't be here," added Leonda, who is charismatic, chatty and also 19. "Not to say that this is a horrible place, but I'd be able to stand on my own two feet and live as an adult and be me."

Samantha and Leonda, who are part of a wave of homeless young folks that has swollen the ranks of Covenant House's residents by 25 percent, expressed deep anxiety about their future. But they also knew their worth. When asked what they wanted to tell the people in power, Samantha didn't hesitate.

"I say, We are your future. If we don't make it now, then who's going to take care of you when y'all is in y'all retirement phase?" she asked. "If we don't make it out of this, then basically the whole world don't make it out of this." ■

The State of Youth Organizing

by KRISTINA RIZGA

When the Obama campaign inspired and mobilized a wave of new young voters, youth organizers across the country rejoiced. They anticipated increased funding from donors and foundations to help bring this growing voting bloc into policy debates and community organizing. They hoped for increased media coverage for issues ranging from college costs to green jobs to healthcare reform. Instead, youth organizers have often found themselves feeling as if they're sitting on a bus that's out of service. As markets crashed, already meager funding pools got even smaller. Most media outlets chose to spotlight the absence of youth at healthcare town halls, which were often staged at empty college campuses over the summer break, rather than the thousands of environmental and education activists who stormed Washington to support reductions of carbon emissions, creation of green jobs and the passage of the DREAM Act. And with a few exceptions, the Obama administration stopped talking to young people directly.

EDWIN VAZQUEZ

Despite these obstacles, young activists continued to organize. *The Nation* asked four leading youth organizers to suggest specific ways the Obama administration and the progressive movement could help them succeed in 2010 to mobilize the most diverse and socially progressive generation.

Biko Baker, League of Young Voters

Until 2008 the League of Young Voters had focused most of our advocacy efforts at either the local or state level. Until very recently, flexing our muscle at the federal level seemed like the "out of reach" brass ring. Although we have a number of key local victories under our belt, like many other groups, we entered this year ready and willing to learn how things work in DC.

The biggest lesson we've learned through this process is that it is absolutely pivotal for our generation—and the broader progressive movement—to go from "opposition to proposition." In short, we can't engage in reactionary politics, where we are only responding to an injustice or negative piece of policy. We will never be able to bring true change to the world if we are only organizing around problems and never getting to the root causes.

But it seems like in the past several months the Obama administration has focused way too much on the naysayers and haters. If it is truly going to be a vehicle for change, it has to stop being afraid of celebrating the extraordinary work taking place at the local level. All across this country young people are developing businesses, coming up with innovations and creating models that could help this country get its swagger back. Put the spotlight back on us and you'll see a completely different narrative.

Matias Ramos, United We Dream

The DREAM Act—a bill in Congress that seeks to create an earned path to legal status for undocumented immigrant youth—failed to pass 377 days before Obama was elected. It was introduced again sixty-five days after his inauguration, and thousands of people like me—undocumented students—are still counting the days.

Our country is home to about 2.5 million undocumented youth. Only a fraction of them have an opportunity to enroll in

Kristina Rizga, a member of the Nation *editorial board, is the executive editor of* WireTap, *a political youth magazine, and a project director of Future5000.com.*

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college like I did. That's a huge loss for our economy, because college graduates earn (and pay taxes on) twice as much income as those without high school diplomas. In 2006, five years after undocumented students were allowed to enter Texas colleges at in-state tuition rates, the state comptroller reported that undocumented workers produced $1.58 billion in state revenues, which exceeded the $1.16 billion in state services they received.

This year there is undeniable and growing energy within our movement, coming from immigrants and citizens alike. United We Dream, a youth-led immigrants' rights network mobilizing support for the DREAM Act, was established to provide a united front made up of a few national organizations, dozens of student groups and individual students hungry for change. In June hundreds of DREAMers went to Washington for a symbolic "DREAM Act Graduation." Thousands more participated in more than 120 local actions in twenty-eight states celebrating back-to-school day in September.

We need progressives of all ages and backgrounds to join in this fight. Establishing a progressive immigration policy should be a goal not only for the Latino or Asian-American communities but for all those concerned with social justice and fairness. DREAMers across the country are saying the time is now. We know—we've been counting the days.

Jessy Tolkan, Energy Action Coalition

On November 4, 2008, an entire generation's sense of what was possible changed. For millions of young Americans, with Obama's election came the understanding that our voices mattered, that we were more powerful than we thought. At the Energy Action Coalition, a partnership of more than fifty organizations united in the fight for a clean energy future, we also dreamed that an Obama administration would pass a strong climate and energy agenda.

A year later we find ourselves looking back to November 4 for the inspiration necessary to keep up the fight. The realities of bitter partisanship have set in, and the attention from Obama that we basked in during the campaign has diminished. During the election, we found ourselves one of the most coveted constituencies around. Direct asks from Obama to get involved were commonplace. We are now considered a safe base—Obama's strongest supporters—and we are left wondering how that position is impacting our ability to ensure that our issues and our agenda are met.

In the year since the election, we've been able to shift our strategy in fundamental ways. We're no longer fighting those who deny that climate change is real or urgent. Instead, we're engaging in a debate about real legislation. In March, 12,000 young people descended on Washington for Power Shift 2009, filling Congressional halls to demand passage of a strong climate bill.

But the process of passing legislation in Washington can frustrate even the most dedicated activist. There's plenty of opportunity to point fingers—at Congress, at the White House and certainly right back at ourselves. We need to understand that our job didn't end the day we turned out to vote in record numbers. But we need the president's help. We need him to

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talk directly to the millions of young people who helped him win and remind them that he still needs them.

Matt Singer, Bus Federation

Let me start by saying what the challenges have not been. Young people are not apathetic about healthcare reform, despite the claims of many in the pundit class. The reality is that 18- to 29-year-olds are the most likely age group to lack insurance and are the most supportive of progressive healthcare reform. The second imagined challenge is a lack of effective organizing models for youth on healthcare. Again, the reality is that a number of groups innovated great tactics for field organizing and media outreach, from the Young Invincibles' photo petitions to the "Fake Doctor Invasion" street canvasses our organization did.

The biggest challenge in the youth sector over the past year has been a combination of an internal failure of youth organizations and a lack of external support from the progressive movement. Despite a youth sector brimming with organizations that have done amazing electoral and policy work, these organizations tend to be extremely resource-poor and overly reliant on a handful of foundations and major donors. These big supporters have made all this work possible, helping drive record levels of voter turnout. But any model predicated on foundation and major-donor backing was in trouble heading into 2009.

If youth organizations are to more effectively inject our generation's powerful perspective into policy debates, we are going to have to develop stronger funding mechanisms that bring in resources from the young Americans we represent. The path to strength is to develop grassroots fundraising models for making youth organizations supported the way organized labor is—by millions of individual members who see reason to contribute. Significant membership will also give youth organizations the resources to put organizers on the ground. This will allow us to use the same face-to-face organizing tactics that have proven most effective for youth organizing. Real base-building and deeper organizing will free our organizations from the boom-bust cycle of foundation funding—and make our organizations even stronger when it comes to working in the electoral and policy realms. ■

Stonewall 2.0

Since California's Prop 8, a new generation of gay activists have jumped into the fray.

by CHRISTOPHER LISOTTA

Before November 2008, Tanner Efinger was just another 24-year-old working at a bar in the city of West Hollywood, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) center of Los Angeles. "I was really not a political person, even a little bit," he says. "I didn't even know who Nancy Pelosi was and didn't really understand what a senator was."

But that all changed after the election of Barack Obama and the passage of Proposition 8, the voter referendum that banned same-sex marriage in California. At a postelection Prop 8 rally, it hit Efinger that despite all the cultural assimilation he has witnessed in his young life, gay people were still second-class citizens when it came to legal rights. "It is totally unfair," he says. "I thought, 'I know nothing about politics, but what can I do? I don't even have activist friends.' So I started Postcards to the President."

Using his workplace as a catalyst, Efinger encouraged people to write postcards to Obama encouraging him to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the 1996 federal legislation signed by Bill Clinton that defines marriage as something only between one man and one woman. "I like to joke he created a monster, and now he has to be prepared to feed it," Efinger says, touting Obama's call for supporters to be the change they believe in. Events at bars in New York and San Francisco followed, along with a website and Facebook page. According to Efinger, more than 15,000 postcards have been sent from thirty states, with his most recent Postcards to the President event taking place in Bowling Green, Kentucky. "It all happened so quickly," he says. "My life has changed completely."

JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP

Efinger is not alone. Until late last year, LGBT activism had been dominated for more than a decade by a handful of estab-

Christopher Lisotta is a writer and television producer in California. In 2005 he won a GLAAD Media Award for an article he wrote for The Nation.

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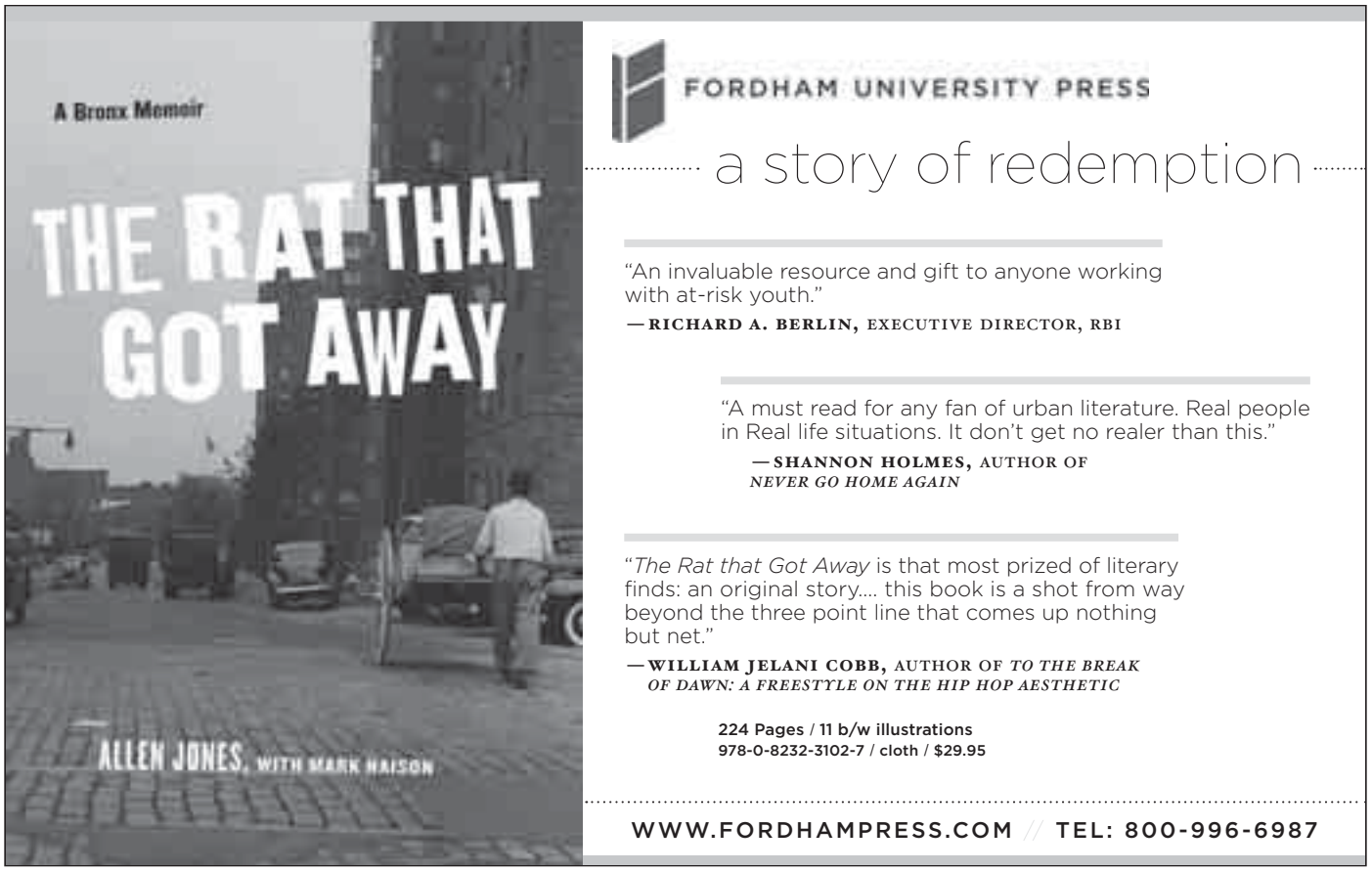
lished national organizations like the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, along with a network of statewide groups. These gay organizations saw scattered progress in the waning days of the Clinton administration and then fought vainly against a tide of state referendums banning gay marriage. But with Obama's election and the anger that grew out of Prop 8's unexpected passage, a host of twentysomethings have jumped into the fray with a new set of national strategies, often starting or joining new grassroots organizations that bypass the old guard.

Arisha Michelle Hatch is a 27-year-old attorney in San Francisco who quit her job early last year and began phone-banking for Obama. "I haven't gone back to the law firm yet," Hatch explains, noting that in March she joined up with Courage Campaign, a California-based group that is pushing for gay equality. Hatch is now the Southern California field manager for the organization's equality program. But most recently she was on loan to Maine, fighting Question 1, the statewide same-sex-marriage ban. Hatch was stunned last November when California, which went heavily for Obama, also passed Prop 8. She was even more shocked when news reports connected Prop 8's passage to majority support from African-Americans. "I don't want to believe that of my people," she says. "It is important as a straight African-American woman brought up in a Baptist church to say, This is about equality, and it's not OK."

The kids are not doing it all by themselves, however. Courage Campaign was begun by Rick Jacobs, an established organizer who was Howard Dean's California campaign chair in 2004. And Efinger has become more involved thanks to Cleve Jones, who as a young man worked for slain San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk and went on to create the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Now a labor activist, Jones began receiving thousands of e-mails from young people after they saw the Oscar-winning film *Milk*, which came out after the November election. In many of the e-mails Jones kept reading about young people's desire for a national march for LGBT equality, which at first he actively discouraged. "I viewed it through the lens of other marches," he says, "which had been enormously expensive, where some people weren't paid and other people were paid too much."

Like many others, Jones assumed that with Obama entering the White House and Democrats holding majorities in Congress, a gay rights agenda would move forward. But then Obama picked antigay pastor Rick Warren to speak at his inauguration, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suggested that repealing DOMA was not a priority. On his website veteran Democratic operator David Mixner called for a national marriage equality march in November; Jones wrote back that it should be a full equality march, in October and done for no money. Mixner agreed on an LGBT website and said Jones was organizing it.

It was then that all hell broke loose, Jones recalls. "The whole chorus started singing about how this was impossible and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irresponsible," he says of the more established LGBT rights groups. "But in the community people just totally got it and got it early. All I did was reach out."

Privately many LGBT career advocates dismissed the march, suggesting it would be little more than a high school hot mess. Congressman Barney Frank publicly called it a "waste of time" and, using his signature wit, predicted that "the only thing they're going to be putting pressure on is the grass."

But in the meantime younger, less experienced organizers jumped on board. Jones stresses that he played only a small part in organizing the event compared with the work done by the many young people he met through promoting *Milk*, including guys like Efinger. On Columbus Day weekend, Efinger and Jones joined some 200,000 demonstrators for a march that culminated in a rally in front of Capitol Hill. The weekend's activities included meetings with legislators, organizing seminars and other networking events that were set up without the support of established gay groups. Efinger notes that with a budget of just $200,000, the organizers pulled off an event that "cost less than a dollar a person."

'Sure, I want to get married one day, but I'm certainly not thinking about it right now.'
—Gay youth activist Conrad Honicker

Besides being an activist incubator, the National Equality March was also an amplifier. Utah native Chloe Noble, 27, owned a cleaning service and had done some work with a local shelter, but when it became clear that Prop 8 had passed in part because of the heavy involvement of the Mormon Church, she got motivated. Noble, who identifies as "bi-queer," was shocked to find out that as many as 40 percent of homeless teens identify as LGBT, according to a study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. That prompted her to begin a 6,000-mile walk across America to raise awareness of LGBT homeless youth through her organization Operation Shine. But Noble put her journey on hold when National Equality March organizers asked her to plan a youth event at nearby Gallaudet University the weekend of the Capitol Hill demonstration. She put together more than a dozen programs at the three-day fair, including a flash mob that involved hundreds of people. Back on the road, Noble says, "The youth that I worked with nationwide are really angry, and that's the most common thing I hear them say about what's happening in the United States."

That anger has led to a sea change in the fight for LGBT equality, which had been dominated by state-by-state fights and an almost surgical focus on a limited number of federal issues, like repealing "don't ask, don't tell." In contrast the National Equality March demanded "equal protection in all matters governed by civil law in all 50 states."

Jones is fully aware that enthusiasm from marches and other big events comes and goes. From the post-Stonewall years to Harvey Milk, ACT UP and the development of an LGBT "market" by corporate advertisers, he's seen it all. But this time he feels things are different. After the election someone used the term "Stonewall 2.0," Jones says. "When I read that, I snickered out loud and said to myself, We'll see about that." But now Jones says that he is witnessing a "sustained national grassroots movement." "Not one of the national organizations has come close to it," he observes.

Efinger is among the many trying to maintain the momentum from the National Equality March. He is working with the march's outgrowth organization, Equality Across America, to organize Congressional District Action Teams, or CDATS, in all districts to put pressure on local representatives.

"This has been going on now for a full year," Jones says. "Part of it is Barack getting elected. You can be as cynical as you want, but you can't deny the milestone of that generation."

Conrad Honicker is one of that generation. A senior in high school, he is already something of a veteran organizer. Soon after he came out at 14, Honicker led his first demonstration in his hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee. "It was the largest LGBT rally Knoxville had ever seen," he explains. He also fought to have a Gay-Straight Alliance club in his high school, a first for Knox County. Not only did Honicker succeed; the greater Knoxville area now boasts eight GSA clubs. Thanks to a National Equality March co-chair who was also a Knoxville native, Honicker was asked to be on the steering committee, which makes sense, since much of his free time is spent whipping together local rallies and other events, including a gay-friendly prom. "I guess I just like to stay busy organizing," he admits.

When the march organizers proposed legislation as benchmarks to establish equality, Honicker noticed there was nothing youth-specific. "They were all really good pieces of legislation," he says. "Sure, I want to get married one day, but I'm certainly not thinking about it right now."

Honicker suggested advocating federal antibullying legislation, "which is very much needed," he says with some tension in his voice. As an intern at the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, the local GSAs' national umbrella organization, Honicker attended Obama's June reception commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion. Honicker spoke to Obama about antibullying and felt that the president was very supportive.

While other gay advocates have been skeptical of Obama's commitment, Honicker is willing to take the president at his word, even though he understands that older activists rue the lost opportunities of the Clinton years. "Maybe an older generation—anybody over 25—might be feeling like it's just going to be a repeat of the Clinton administration," Honicker says, fully cognizant that he has no political memory of those setbacks.

"I don't think it's right that he's not just ending 'don't ask, don't tell' or not ending DOMA. But at the same time, that's not what I'm going to be complaining about," he adds. "I'm complaining about the policies and not him. We have to work to change how the system operates and how we function within the system." ■

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Tales of the Great Recession

For the fourth annual Nation *Student Writing Contest, we asked students to send us an original, unpublished, 800-word essay detailing how the recession had affected them. We received hundreds of submissions from high school and college students in forty-four states. We chose one college and one high school winner and eight finalists total. The winners are Jim Miller of Henderson State University in Arkansas and Deborah Ghim of Buffalo Grove High School in Illinois. You can read the essays at TheNation.com/student. The winners receive a cash award of $1,000 and the finalists, $250 each. All receive* Nation *subscriptions. This contest was made possible by the BIL Charitable Trust to recognize and reward the best in student writing and thinking.* —*The Editors*

The Natural Order of a Small Town
by JIM MILLER

The strangest thing about the recession if you live in Arkansas is that things seem pretty much the same as they were before with the exception of a few subtle differences. It just seems like everyone else in the country is catching up.

The smallest library in the entire United States resides in a rural town in Arkansas, and it has no books in it. There is a blue tarp over the roof because it started leaking a few years ago. Small towns in the area are a lot like this tiny 15-by-24-foot library. These erstwhile communities are disappearing, leaving nothing but road signs, with lonely post offices, empty parks and closed gas stations. Public school districts have gotten so spread out that it's getting more and more difficult to afford diesel for the buses to pick children up for school. These are the kids living on dirt roads an hour away from the nearest city. Their parents are the ones losing the jobs.

EDWIN VAZQUEZ

The economic life of a small town in Arkansas has always been precarious, but the recession has greatly accelerated the decline. There are still the same number of empty houses on stretches of highway. It's just that now you see more used vehicles for sale. Older generations believe that this is the natural order of things, like when a well dries up and a new one springs up somewhere else to take its place. This is why they save their Folgers coffee cans and anything else that might help to make life easier.

Growing up in areas like this is becoming harder, and so the numbers of young are dwindling, and small, rural areas are drying up. A graduating class of forty students has become a class of twenty, and the only explanation is that there are no local jobs. There are no local jobs because the timber industry is no longer what it used to be. In high school, kids look forward to having an office view of the interstate while sitting behind the wheel of an eighteen-wheeler that they might be lucky enough to own one day. Or maybe they will nab a job at the Willie Nelson water-bottling factory in the next town over, where new mothers drive to renew their WIC vouchers so they can purchase baby formula and blocks of government cheese. Some women, like my mother, sew cuffs on firemen's gloves in a factory. They are happy to have a job with good insurance. It's not the type of insurance that will help you quit smoking a pack a day unless you're clinically depressed, but all the same it's good insurance. It numbs the realization that you are hardly getting paid anything.

I guess that one thing almost every employable person in this area can look forward to is applying for a job at Wal-Mart. The company was born in Arkansas, and it is always taking applications because it's capable of weathering the storm. This is more than can be said for Affiliated Southwest, an Arkansas food distributor that abruptly declared bankruptcy earlier this summer, leaving hundreds of small-town groceries sweating bullets and damning the economy. Most of these stores simply readjusted to the situation by going with other food distributors in neighboring states, but many small business owners lost their retirements in the process.

Students and others throughout the country are being encouraged to continue their education, and many of them do it by taking out school loans or maxing out their mother's credit cards so she has to take out loans herself, either from the credit union at the Social Security office where she works or at the bank where her husband used to deposit the proceeds from his air-conditioning business before it went belly up.

Here and there you might find an independent farmer who still remembers what it's like to be self-sufficient. And then there are people like my father, who purchased cattle as a life insurance policy, because insurance companies won't touch a man with a pre-existing condition. All throughout the country there are now people resolved to live their lives simply out of necessity and not want. In the end maybe this is a good thing. Maybe sooner or later a new spring will bloom.

Strawberry Fields Forever
by DEBORAH GHIM

Seventeen years ago, when my mother was pregnant with me, all she ever wanted to eat was strawberries—at least according to the stories that I've been told. Some of them involve trips to the local Jewel at 2 in the morning. Others involve detailed descriptions of a very irate pregnant woman and her demands for Godiva chocolate-covered strawberries. My father jokes that even in the womb I had expensive tastes.

And it seems that little has changed since 1991. Though I've matured some since I was a fetus, my strawberry cravings have remained the same. Because I don't really have an appetite in

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the morning, my breakfast has become a regular routine: ten medium-size strawberries, one-quarter cup of fat-free yogurt and four ice cubes thrown into a blender.

When the recession hit its peak this past year, my father called an emergency family meeting. The Ghim family, he announced, was going to start cutting back. It was a well-prepared and predictable speech, as was the family's reaction. I vowed to stop leaving my laptop on at night, and Douglas, my little brother, promised to turn the faucet off while brushing his teeth. These were minor sacrifices, my father reasoned, things we should have been doing anyway.

A couple of days passed and the economy continued to plummet, but still the Ghim family did not cut back. Douglas did not turn off the faucet while brushing his teeth. I forgot to turn off my laptop every night. It wasn't as though we were too well-off to feel the financial strains. On the contrary, we could easily define ourselves as lower middle class in terms of income. It's just that with our house paid off and no debts to haunt us, the world of foreclosures and eviction notices seemed relatively remote. The recession merely meant that I had to car-pool more often to save gas money.

But one day my father came home from the grocery store with a solemn look on his face. I went to help him put the foodstuff away in the kitchen. When I turned to stow the eggs in the refrigerator, he put his hand gently on my arm and told me in a quiet voice that he hadn't bought any strawberries this time. "They were $6.50 a pound," he said incredulously. "That's five times what it used to be when you were born."

I tried not to laugh. He was being overly dramatic. I said that it was really OK, but he proceeded to apologize several times throughout the day. "You don't understand," he told me. "When I got married, I told myself that my kids would get to eat whatever they wanted. They wouldn't have to go through what I did. I might not be able to buy you an iPhone, but I should damned well be able to buy my daughter some strawberries."

A month later, the price of fresh strawberries dropped to $2.25 per pound. I know this because when I came home from school, my father was in the kitchen, washing fifteen pounds of strawberries. I watched as he cut off each stem. Half of them would be in the fridge for me to eat that week, and the other half he'd put in a Ziploc bag to freeze for later.

"Why don't we just buy frozen strawberries?" I asked. "This is a lot of work for something that they already sell in a bag."

"My daughter is going to eat fresh strawberries," he sniffed. "Nothing with those nasty preservatives. I may be too poor to buy you strawberries next week when they get up to $6 again, but I can still provide for you."

I don't ever remember hugging my dad for as long as I did that day. Since then, I've remembered to turn off my laptop every night before I go to bed. For me, the recession's impact has come more on the human level. I know economic struggles are real, but my father has shown me an aspect of the recession defined by responsibility and compassion.

I have college looming in the near future, and I'm terrified that I won't be able to afford it. Still, I know it'll all work out. I know that I'll be responsible with my money, not just for my future but for my father. I'll always remember the work he did to provide for his family. And most of all, I'll always remember the way he smiled as he stowed two Ziploc bags full of strawberries in the garage freezer, humming "Strawberry Fields Forever." ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

exercising our democratic rights: protesting, voting and direct action. In addition, on a daily basis our branches provide assistance to the communities within which they live, whether by fighting police brutality, school closings, predatory lending or for prisoners' rights. We applaud organizations that provide direct service through AIDS clinics, food banks etc., but the tragic reality is that helping one person secure healthcare is not as powerful as securing healthcare reform for the entire country; helping one person out of debt is not as effective as changing usury laws; even saving the life of one man on death row—as we are fighting for in several cases—is not as transformative as ending capital punishment.

Coates completely misses the grassroots character of the NAACP and the community-based efforts practiced regularly in church and local neighborhoods on parenting, personal responsibility *and* advocacy for policy change and social responsibility. He ignores the fact that with the Jena Six, the NAACP was an integral part of the community on the ground fighting to organize before, during and after the big demonstrations. The NAACP is organically connected to local communities because it is made up of the everyday folks who live there. Our close to 700,000 members are all community volunteers.

Coates implies that we should focus on direct social service while government, an entity that collects billions of dollars of our communities' taxes, should be left alone to do with our tax dollars as it sees fit. Without democratic action from the people, government will certainly be free to serve the very wealthy and corporate entities whose interests are antithetical to democracy. We are the umpire on peace, human rights, equality and justice—all that makes a democracy real. We fight for an America where the dream can be realized by all. We make no apologies for that noble goal.

THE REV. DR. AMOS BROWN
President, San Francisco branch, NAACP
Member, NAACP national board

Coates Replies

NEW YORK CITY

It was wrong, and inaccurate, to imply that Myrlie Evers Williams had been president of the NAACP. I apologize to her and the NAACP. I think that much of the rest of Amos Brown's charges are matters of interpretation, and I leave it to the reader to weigh them. I don't agree that he was owed a phone call, as the section he refers to is, quite clearly, about Jealous's election—not about how membership regards him now.

As for the charge that I "attempt to parse social service and social justice," I can only offer the words of the NAACP's chair, from my article: "'I think people generally like social service,' says [Julian] Bond. 'White, black, liberal, conservative, they all like social service—Habitat for Humanity, for instance. It can be done quickly, whereas social justice can take years. There's nothing wrong with social service. But we are one of the few organizations focusing on social justice.'"

TA-NEHISI COATES

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Books & the Arts.

Gladwell for Dummies

by MAUREEN TKACIK

That success is in the eye of the unsuccessful would seem to be the great unspoken dilemma dogging critics asked to consider the work of the rich and famous author and inspirational speaker Malcolm Gladwell. No matter how well intentioned or intellectually honest their attempts to assess his ideas, the subtext of Gladwell's perceived success, and its implications for their own aspirations in the competitive thought-generation business, obscures their judgment and sinks their morale. Nearly a decade has passed since the *New York Times* dryly summarized Gladwell's first book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000), as "a study of social epidemics, otherwise known as fads," and yet, each Sunday, it still taunts perusers of the paperback nonfiction rankings, where it currently sits in sixth place. Gladwell may be merely "a slickster trickster" who "markets marketing" (as James Wolcott put it), or a "clever idea packager" who "cannot conceal the fatuousness of his core conclusions" (science writer John Horgan); he might even be an "idiot" (Leon Wieseltier). But one thing is clear: Gladwell is no fad. He is a brand, a guru, a fixture at New York publishing parties and in the spiels of literary agents hoping to steer writers toward concepts that will strike publishers as "Gladwellian."

By 2005, when Gladwell's second book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, made its debut on the *Times* bestseller list in the No. 2 spot, the assumption had gradually taken hold that despite Gladwell's bona fides as a *New Yorker* staff writer, his success was on some level a triumph of style over substance, verisimilitude over reality, ease over rigor. It did not hurt that the closest *Blink* came to a governing thesis was the foggy notion that too many ideas can spoil an operation.

A gaggle of irate critics, seeking to right this injustice, came charging, pens bravely brandished, only to watch themselves sink into the quicksand of Gladwell's infuriatingly memorable—"sticky," in Gladwellese—concepts and jargon. "Why does spending a weekend with Mr. Gladwell's best-selling books…lead to unhappiness and a pathological fixation on writing in rhetorical questions?" wailed Tom Scocca in the *New York Observer*. So discombobulated was Scocca by this critical game of pin-the-tail that when he finally stopped spinning, he stuck his sticker straight into a tautology. His solution to the Gladwell question was to posit that Gladwell's style had simply gotten too Gladwellian. "The problem with the Malcolm Gladwell Piece," as he put it, "is that it always seems to contain phrases like 'the problem with the Malcolm Gladwell Piece.'"

That Gladwell's most recent blockbuster monograph, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, actually purported to be about success only accelerated the vicious cycle of maddening self-reference, begging as it did a critical Gladwellian case study of Gladwell's own "success." The book's premise can be distilled to a single sentence: success is the result of many variables, most of which lie outside the control of a particular individual. Gladwell illustrates this point through various anecdotes and case studies that teach us a great many things we already know. For instance, hard work and education are important. Also: Culture Matters. Know Thyself. Practice Makes Perfect. Or, in the words of the *Observer*'s Alexandra Jacobs, *Outliers* is about "how super-achievers like—well, like Malcolm Gladwell!—get where they are." And sure enough, in *The New York Times Book Review*, David Leonhardt took the bait, writing a brief alternative history of Glad-

BROOKE WILLIAMS

Malcolm Gladwell

Outliers
The Story of Success.
By Malcolm Gladwell.
Little, Brown. 309 pp. $27.99.

What the Dog Saw
And Other Adventures.
By Malcolm Gladwell.
Little, Brown. 410 pp. $27.99.

Maureen Tkacik, formerly of the Wall Street Journal *and Jezebel, is a financial journalist in New York City.*

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well's life crediting said "success" to his parents' professions. His mother, a psychotherapist, and his father, a mathematician, "pointed young Malcolm toward the behavioral sciences, whose popularity would explode in the 1990s," wrote Leonhardt; in addition, his mother, who "just happened to be a writer on the side," taught him "'that there is beauty in saying something clearly and simply.'"

But in examining Gladwell's success concurrently with his prescriptions for achievement, even his harshest reviewers damned themselves with faint criticism. When Michiko Kakutani dismissed *Outliers* for employing the patented Gladwell "shake-and-bake" recipe "in such a clumsy manner that it italicizes the weaknesses of his methodology," she still granted him a coherent method; when *The Economist* embraced the book's "engaging" and "intriguing" case studies while wryly enclosing the overarching "big idea" in quotation marks, it overlooked Gladwell's refusal to engage meaningfully with the world of ideas at all.

Gladwell's 'experts' promise readers mastery of a complex and competitive world.

The Economist was astute to observe that the sheer obviousness of *Outliers*' core ideas, which were "unlikely to take even the least reflective reader by surprise," marked a departure from *The Tipping Point*. But when the magazine described *The Tipping Point*'s chief attraction as its title concept's capacity to lend "the power of apparent inevitability to almost any argument," it failed to mention that the concept was central to *Outliers* as well—this despite that the purported aim of *Outliers* was to remind readers that "success," for most of us, is anything but inevitable. Such are the contradictions that seem to riddle not just Gladwell's thinking but the thinking on Gladwell's thinking, and perhaps even the thinking on thinking on that, and it is precisely these slippery but substantive contradictions that have allowed Gladwell to tout his revolutionary "big ideas" without couching them in anything so mundane as a logical, well-supported or otherwise sound argument. In this failing, he is not unique among either media mavens or the intelligentsia, but he is, perhaps, outstanding. "I don't really think of myself as an outlier," Gladwell told *New York* magazine late last year. "At the end of the day, I'm just a journalist."

In 1996 *The New Yorker* hired Gladwell as a staff writer after first publishing an essay he wrote for the magazine's "Black in America" special issue. He had spent the previous nine years at the *Washington Post*, where he covered health policy and science. In his rumination on the nuances of prejudice (which is the basis of the last chapter of *Outliers*), Gladwell defenestrated the fallacy that Canadians are less racist than Americans with an anecdote describing a coffee date with an old college acquaintance. The man launched into a tirade about the threat Toronto was facing from Jamaican immigrants, Jamaica being the outpost where all the most "troublesome and obstreperous" slaves had been sent. "I have told that story many times since, usually as a joke, because it was funny in an appalling way," wrote the half-Jamaican Gladwell. "I tell the story that way because otherwise it is too painful."

"Somebody," he concludes, "always has to be the nigger."

That Gladwell would rarely again end a story with such a downer of a line is in evidence in his new book, *What the Dog Saw*, a collection of his articles from his tenure at *The New Yorker*. The collection provides an archive of just a fraction of the stories he's written since the mid-'90s, when, under the employ of the magazine's famously buzz-obsessed former editor Tina Brown, Gladwell began studiously scrubbing his sentences of the mildew of the old, liberating his readers from references to anything that might dirty undiluted all-newness with the dourness of precedent. Gladwell focused his sights on the more vacuous anxieties of the heirs and heiresses of American affluence. In 1999 he wrote a story called "Running From Ritalin," about the wildly overprescribed drug for attention-deficit disorder, which he claimed was merely the modern answer to a widespread dopamine deficiency that previous generations had treated with cigarettes and cocaine, "a drug," he explains helpfully, "that people thought would help them master the complexity and the competitive pressures of the world around them." Soon after, Gladwell would tackle college admissions, shopping, parenting, standardized testing, corporate culture and transformative household inventions of the twentieth century, often all in the space of a few dozen column inches, and in the template that he had fashioned in the Ritalin story: a cheerful, conversational voice deployed in a perfectly paced dopamine prose that had the palliative effect of nullifying whatever concerns readers might have about this product or that problem.

Gladwell promised readers mastery of the complex and competitive world around them, if only they would accept the facile conclusions he extrapolated from the findings of the many endearingly eccentric, iconoclastic scholars and researchers who were busy applying the scientific method to the investigation of everyday living. These scientists tended to share a universal message: contrary to our latent anxieties about modern life, everything is all right—or can be, with a few minor psychopharmacological tweaks—so come on, get happy! From a stammering "retail anthropologist" we learn that shoppers are not nearly so slavish and easily manipulated as the chain stores believe them to be. From a "heroically counterintuitive" historian of loopholes we learn to appreciate, rather than resent, tax cheats, smut peddlers and sources close to the investigation who exploit the letter of the law to undermine its spirit. From a series of surprisingly sincere marketing executives we gain a nuanced appreciation for both the fullness ("amplitude," in industry parlance) of the taste of ketchup and the subtle subversiveness of early Clairol commercials. "In writing the history of women in the postwar era," Gladwell wonders in this last piece, "did we forget something important? Did we leave out the hair?"

Gladwell's protagonists are generally intelligent but ordinary folks who have imbued their work with a passionate practicality. Their laboratories are courtrooms and high-concept shopping malls, office parks and African villages, but whatever their locale, they are always buried in data, endless stacks and reams and massive videotape libraries full of tens of thousands of hours of footage documenting their findings, their desks buckling under thick piles of "carefully annotated tracking sheets." With this abundance of evidence they espouse theories that Gladwell depicts either as regrettably naïve or courageously counterintuitive, depending on whether he is debunking conventional wisdom or advancing a hitherto unknown experimental truth. He takes pains to skewer, for instance, the delusion that the Central Park jogger was saved by a "miracle" and the misconception that the *Challenger* explosion revealed a hideously corrupt species of neglect at NASA. Particularly vexing to Gladwell and his data marshals are overblown health hazards scaring the consumptive populace off such marvels as breast implants, estrogen therapy, newfangled birth control pills and products containing the

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fat substitute Olestra, the famed and feared "stool loosening" side effect of which Gladwell expends many sentences likening to that of bran cereal.

A recurring straw man for Gladwell is misguided evangelism, generally the kind that rallies around fringe causes, though his aversion to strident moralism usually keeps him from fixing on a villain. A notable exception is the late diet guru Dr. Atkins, upon whom he loosed his most withering scorn in a comprehensive takedown of the diet industry published in 1998. Otherwise Gladwell seems to regard his intellectual foes as somewhat pathetic figures. He wants to love, for instance, Dr. Susan Love—the charismatic but suspiciously shrill critic of estrogen therapy he profiled in 1997—but the data just don't support her claim that the treatment dramatically increases women's risk of developing breast cancer. Estrogen, however, does cause breast cancer, we learn three years later in "John Rock's Error," the cautionary tale of another wayward evangelist, the Roman Catholic doctor who helped develop the birth control pill. Rock lobbied the Catholic Church to lift its ban on the pill and, having failed, eventually lost his faith in God and drank himself to death.

In a 1998 article called "Do Parents Matter?" Gladwell championed the findings of one Judith Rich Harris, a "fragile, elfin" and grandmotherly editor of child-psychology textbooks who had published a groundbreaking study purporting to show that parents are rarely to blame for screwing up their kids. Harris had formulated her hypothesis while editing a book on juvenile delinquency that offhandedly credited the motivation for such behavior to the desire to be more like adults. "Adolescents aren't trying to be like adults—they are trying to *contrast* themselves with adults," she explained to Gladwell. But like a fickle teenager, Gladwell would casually shrug off the wisdom he had gleaned from Harris in a piece that appeared several months later. Here he contrasts the television show *Beverly Hills, 90210*, which "played to the universal desire of adolescents to be grownups," with its spin-off, *Melrose Place*:

> "Melrose" was the opposite. It started with a group of adults—doctors, advertising executives, fashion designers—and dared to have them behave as foolishly and as naively as adolescents. Most of them lived in the same apartment building, where they fought and drank and wore really tight outfits and slept together in every conceivable permutation. They were all dumb, and the higher they rose in the outside world the dumber they got when they came home to Melrose Place.
>
> In the mid-nineteen-nineties, when a generation of Americans reached adulthood and suddenly realized that they didn't want to be there, the inverted world of Melrose was a wonderfully soothing place. Here, after all, was a show that ostensibly depicted sophisticated grownup society, and every viewer was smarter than the people on the screen.

But for all this vapidity, Gladwell finds something to admire in the melodrama: restraint.

> The wonderful thing about "Melrose Place" was that just when you thought that the show was about to make some self-consciously postmodern commentary on, say, the relationship between art and life, it had the courage to take the easy way out and go for the laugh.

The publication of Gladwell's first book, *The Tipping Point*, proved his courage to be of a similar character. *The Tipping Point* was named for an epidemiological phenomenon that he had introduced to the public when he covered healthcare policy for the *Post*. Healthcare reporting is a beat that notoriously leaves journalists disillusioned by the destructive influence of money and markets on the public welfare; in Gladwell's case, it provided the central metaphor for a book that applied the observations of health officials to the business of "want creation," otherwise known as branding. Gladwell describes the genesis of the book in detail in a "Q&A With Malcolm" on Gladwell.com:

> The word "Tipping Point"…comes from the world of epidemiology. It's the name given to that moment in an epidemic when a virus reaches critical mass. It's the boiling point. It's the moment on the graph when the line starts to shoot straight upwards. AIDS tipped in 1982, when it went from a rare disease affecting a few gay men to a worldwide epidemic. Crime in New York City tipped in the mid 1990's, when the murder rate suddenly plummeted. When I heard that phrase for the first time I remember thinking—

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> wow. What if everything has a Tipping Point? Wouldn't it be cool to try and look for Tipping Points in business, or in social policy, or in advertising or in any number of other nonmedical areas?

The product of this endeavor was what Gladwell calls "an intellectual adventure story," a genre-crossing book that whipped up a "little bit of sociology, a little of psychology and a little bit of history," tossed in some epidemiology and "examples from the worlds of business and education and fashion and media," and hocked the resulting mishmash of soft social science and hard cases to help readers make "sense of the world, because I'm not sure that the world always makes as much sense to us as we would hope."

The temptation to try to calculate *The Tipping Point*'s own tipping point seems thus far to have been resisted, but there is no doubt that the book reached a great many Mavens, Salesmen and Connectors and eventually became a phenomenal success. To what was that success attributable? Surely encoding the principles of bestsellingness and infection by word of mouth in the book's DNA did some of the work, but there were other contributing factors, not the least of which was what has become Gladwell's signature style, which projects the expertise of a scientist and the easy helpfulness of the guy who delivers the local television station's "news you can use" segment at 6:25.

In searching for an anecdote or image with which to convey the ultra-absorbency of Gladwell's book as compared with that of his soggier-sentenced peers, I found myself remembering a story Gladwell wrote in 2001 about the technology of diapers. In this story, Gladwell reported that "those in the trade" refer to the waste that diapers are engineered to retain as "the insult," and this image seems to me as useful as any for thinking about Gladwell's success. His masterful maneuver was to engineer a style that artfully conceals "the insult," honing it in his articles before finally unleashing it in book form with *The Tipping Point*.

What made *The Tipping Point* remarkable was not the diagrams or axioms or anything it includes but rather what it left out: that is, any discussion of the real risks of business at a moment when its sexiest sector, technology, was increasingly uncertain about how it was going to survive once it had burned through its remaining seed money. Instead, Gladwell celebrated the way certain personality types can, given a hospitable set of circumstances, or "context," conspire with extraneous forces to profoundly alter human behavior—without ever dwelling on how this might be a bad thing or bothering to provide a clear definition of the word "context." In the "Q&A," Gladwell says he hopes readers will use the "new set of tools"—"brain software"—he provides them to create "'positive' epidemics" of their own. Dr. Atkins is nowhere to be found, nor is Susan Love; instead, he populates his book with a nonthreatening cast of folksy, relatable characters—behavioral psychologists, petty criminals and criminologists, effusive socialites and seminarians, Big Bird and Peter Jennings—and tells their stories in a manner so adamantly engaging that it reads suspiciously as if it had been focus-grouped. In conversation with Tom Scocca, Gladwell characterized his style as one that screams "Please, please, don't leave me," and indeed his stories often seem designed to do nothing more than to keep people reading.

This is nowhere more apparent than in *What the Dog Saw*. The book is mostly old news, with the exception of a preface in which Gladwell attempts to justify the methodology behind his pieces, an explanation, it appears, that is also meant as a rejoinder to all those aforementioned heckling critics who have failed, fundamentally, to comprehend Gladwell's project. Complaining that his greatest frustration as a writer has been the angry reader who believes that Gladwell wants him to "buy" his argument, Gladwell asserts,

> Good writing does not succeed or fail on the strength of its ability to persuade. Not the kind of writing that you'll find in this book, anyway. It succeeds or fails on the strength of its ability to engage you, to make you think, to give you a glimpse into someone else's head—even if in the end you conclude that someone else's head is not a place you'd really like to be.

One could quibble with the assertion that a writer's obligation to persuade begins and ends with keeping the reader reading, not in order to convince him of certain conclusions but merely to enable him to satisfy that basic human impulse to explore and temporarily inhabit other minds. But the critic's natural persuasion is to attempt to inhabit the mind of a writer, to evaluate how satisfying the stay was, even in the probable case that one wouldn't want to be lodged there permanently. And one thing that frustrates this reader of Gladwell is his obvious aversion to giving us any privileged access to his mind, encouraging us instead to inhabit more fully the consciousnesses of dogs

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and their whisperers, when one would hope that his mind is an infinitely more interesting place to be. But as Gladwell tells us, "self-consciousness is the enemy of 'interestingness,'" and so perhaps it is that impulse to protect the self from criticism that has so hampered his work, which he chronically undersells even as his books outsell his every rival.

"A book, I was taught long ago in English class, is a living and breathing document that grows richer with each new reading. But I never quite believed that until I wrote *The Tipping Point*," he gushed in the afterword to the 2002 edition, citing the "conferences and retreats and sales meetings" where he had mingled with his readers. "In a world dominated by isolation and immunity, understanding these principles of word of mouth is more important than ever."

Gladwell has said that of all the people he has interviewed, he most identifies with Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the polymath former derivatives trader turned "risk management" guru whom he profiled in April 2002, after Taleb published his breakthrough bestseller *Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets*. Taleb, now "distinguished professor of risk engineering" at NYU, writes chatty, nonlinear nonfiction books that are invariably described as intellectually "provocative…in the tradition of" Malcolm Gladwell. Taleb's follow-up, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2007), examined a phenomenon of the same genus as Gladwell's outlier: a "black swan," according to Taleb, is an unlikely but "consequential event" with profound transformative implications.

But if Taleb shares something in content and style with Gladwell, his books have a markedly different tone. Taleb considers himself a connoisseur of the "epistemic arrogance of the human race," and, unlike Gladwell, he rather conspicuously relishes the chance to hurl "the insult"—in all its freshness—at those aspiring bigwigs misguidedly combing his books for investment strategies. In *Fooled by Randomness*, he mocks his own youthful distrust of philosophy, which he considered "an activity reserved for those who were not well versed in quantitative methods and other productive things," and then describes turning to it later in life, after realizing he was "generally repelled by the wealthy, generally because of the attitude of epic heroism that usually accompanies rapid enrichment." He recounts his gradual recognition that

> $10 million earned through Russian roulette does not have the same value as $10 million earned through the diligent and artful practice of dentistry. They are the same, can buy the same goods, except that one's dependence on randomness is greater than the other's.… Deep down, I cannot help but consider them as qualitatively different.

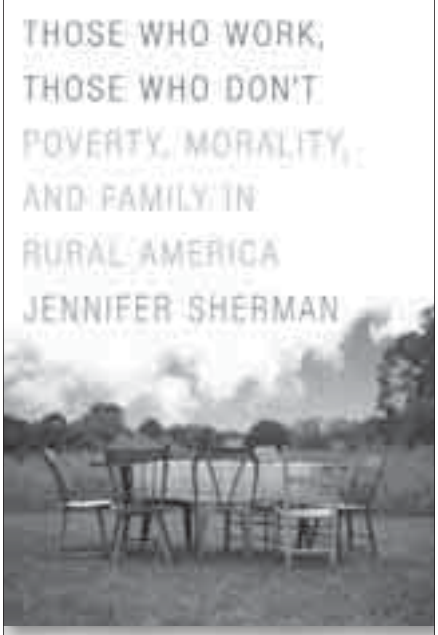
In *The Black Swan*, Taleb elaborated on what Gladwell has called Taleb's "heretical" idea. Cataloging industries on a spectrum between two poles, Extremistan and Mediocristan, where finance in the era of securitization and the art world in the age of digital reproduction hovered near Extremistan and dentists, mechanics and community organizers were still largely anchored in Mediocristan, Taleb closed in on a flaw in the logic of modern capitalism that he felt to be gravely dangerous. The world's financial and consumer superpower had shifted its economy radically toward the "scalable" activities of Extremistan—where the same number of labor hours could result in one sale or 1 million—while maintaining Mediocristan's solidly "average" talent base as well as the base's conventional sense that "success" is largely a function of craftsmanship, experience and innate talent. He did not blame books like *The Tipping Point* for encouraging readers to believe they could game their fates in the face of Extremistan's governing randomness, but he could have.

Gladwell's profile explained none of Taleb's ideas in detail, but its timing was impeccable: in 2002 Wall Street was reeling from the "blow-up" of Enron, the Twin Towers and the accounting industry, and Taleb, who claimed his methods had insulated his fund from such a fate, cut a compelling figure. "We cannot blow up, we can only bleed to death," Taleb told Gladwell. Gladwell likened *Fooled by Randomness* to Martin Luther's ninety-five theses, solemnly concluding:

> This kind of caution does not seem heroic, of course. It seems like the joyless prudence of the accountant and the Sunday-school teacher.… We associate the willingness to risk great failure—and the ability to climb back from catastrophe—with courage. But in this we are wrong. That is the lesson of Nassim Taleb…and also the lesson of our volatile times.

Mirthless as he may appear to Gladwell, Taleb is a millionaire who gets to say he told you so. Why has no one said the same for

"Smart, insightful, and highly readable, this book offers a ground-level account of white rural poverty and the power of moral 'traditionalism.'"
—SHARON HAYS,
author of *Flat Broke with Children*



Compellingly written, shot through with honesty and empathy, *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't* is a rare firsthand account that studies the rural poor. As incomes erode and the American dream becomes more and more inaccessible, Jennifer Sherman reveals that moral values and practices become a way for the poor to gain status and maintain a sense of dignity in the face of economic ruin.

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Gladwell? After all, it's true. Perhaps the reason is partly the unyielding chicken-egg binariness of his patented "To intuit, or to *counter*-intuit?" method, which proved insufficient to explain the increasingly complex topics he approached after Taleb, most notably the implosion of Enron. In "The Talent Myth," published in July 2002, he declared the firm a casualty of the article's titular fallacy, which was then in vogue among many elite companies. He used as evidence the career of Lou Pai, who found himself kicked upstairs so many times that when he left Enron in 2001, he was CEO of one of its largest subsidiaries: "Because Pai had 'talent,' he was given new opportunities, and when he failed at those new opportunities he was given still more opportunities…because he had 'talent.'"

This certainly was likely to interest anyone who bought Taleb's contention, in *Fooled by Randomness*, that the most vexing problem of modern finance was its practitioners' tendency to conflate success and talent. According to their logic, failure equals talent, too! But if both were true, surely an industry rife with Lou Pais was not a little corrupt?

Alas, when presented with the chance to implicate any self-aggrandizing Extremistanis in the crime of succumbing to their context, Gladwell never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. The lesson of Enron, he wrote in "The Talent Myth," was that smart people might be overrated. Five years later, in "Open Secrets," he offered another view, challenging readers to compare Enron with Watergate. Whereas Watergate had been a puzzle, a scandal with an obvious narrator and cast of perpetrators, Enron was a mystery—a scandal too complex to comprehend. "Enron's downfall has been documented so extensively that it is easy to overlook how peculiar it was," he wrote. This assertion might ring less false were it followed by an elaboration of how it differed from other "mysteries": the Enron crooks were caught and prosecuted. One noteworthy event Gladwell fails to mention is the panicked plea of Enron CEO Ken Lay for a federal bailout on grounds of the "systemic risk" the firm's collapse would pose, a plea rejected by Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill. All of this appears to muddy Gladwell's earlier assertion that Enron and its management consultants at McKinsey

> believe in stars, because they don't believe in systems. In a way, that's understandable, because our lives are so obviously enriched by individual brilliance. Groups don't write great novels, and a committee didn't come up with the theory of relativity.

But stars do believe in systems—at least when the system is down several trillion dollars.

Now let's skip ahead to "Group Think," an article Gladwell published in December 2002, just a few months after "The Talent Myth," by which time Gladwell had fixed his lens on some new constellations, the stars of the television show *Saturday Night Live*:

> We are inclined to think that genuine innovators are loners, that they do not need the social reinforcement the rest of us crave. But that's not how it works, whether it's television comedy or, for that matter, the more exalted realms of art and politics and ideas. In his book "The Sociology of Philosophies," Randall Collins finds in all of known history only three major thinkers who appeared on the scene by themselves: the first-century Taoist metaphysician Wang Ch'ung, the fourteenth-century Zen mystic Bassui Tokusho, and the fourteenth-century Arabic philosopher Ibn Khaldun. Everyone else who mattered was part of a movement, a school, a band of followers and disciples and mentors and rivals and friends who saw each other all the time and had long arguments over coffee and slept with one another's spouses.

Stars! They're just like us. Which is to say, every time Gladwell begins to close in on a conclusion of real meaning or intellectual impact, he clicks his heels and returns to the mental *Melrose Place* of quippy clichés. What's more, he apparently has no problem espousing the whole-truthness of two antithetical clichés—the innateness of genius and "The Power of Context" (as Gladwell had christened this truism in *The Tipping Point*) at almost simultaneous moments in time. Reduced further, depending on Gladwell's narrative needs, genius is either nature or nurture, and he has cheerily eaten his cake, wrapped it up neatly in a take-away box and left us wondering where the crumbs disappeared to.

It may seem obvious to some that these are false dichotomies; neither half is ever true to the exclusion of the other. But that is the rub: there are a great many book buyers determined to hedge their bets in precisely this Gladwellian mode. Depending on the situation, they want to believe in the sovereign power of either nature or nurture—to convince themselves that anyone can be a success but also that should one be so unfortunate as to fail, that failure was predestined by an accident of fate. This is the contradictory "story of success" that runs through Gladwell's articles, *The Tipping Point* and *Outliers*. The "power of apparent inevitability," as *The Economist* termed it, is a narrative that his hungriest readers can use to explain any turn their lives might take, and it was precisely these readers who flooded Gladwell's e-mail inbox with raves about how *The Tipping Point* had empowered them to take control of their lives and "contexts."

By the time Gladwell produced a sequel to *The Tipping Point*, *Blink*, his preference for light vignettes featuring plucky heroes over grimmer fare was proving its own insult. In *Blink*'s afterword, he describes the book as "a journey into the wonders of our unconscious" but one that should not "be confused with the unconscious described by Sigmund Freud, which was a dark and murky place filled with desires and memories and fantasies that were too disturbing for us to think about consciously." Instead, *Blink* plumbs an unconscious realm that is surprisingly hospitable. Gladwell makes the case that because human existence is entirely too rich and nuanced to be reducible to data or logic (and by extension, to arguments or allegations), reason and reflex blend over time to yield snap decisions that are often better than the best-laid plans.

If nothing else, it was a counterintuitive moment for Gladwell to come out in favor of intuition: by 2005 the citizenry was turning against the warmongering gut instincts of the commander in chief. In Iraq, the number of casualties continued to mount daily despite Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's entreaty for the public to sit back and wait for the war to reach its tipping point. *Blink* does include a chapter on the war, in which Gladwell reveals that Rumsfeld's disastrous battle plan had been roundly defeated by a retired Marine general named

Early Capitalism

they are perfecting the pillow
with which
you are being
suffocated

now it sings to you
and shows you pictures—

JOE WENDEROTH

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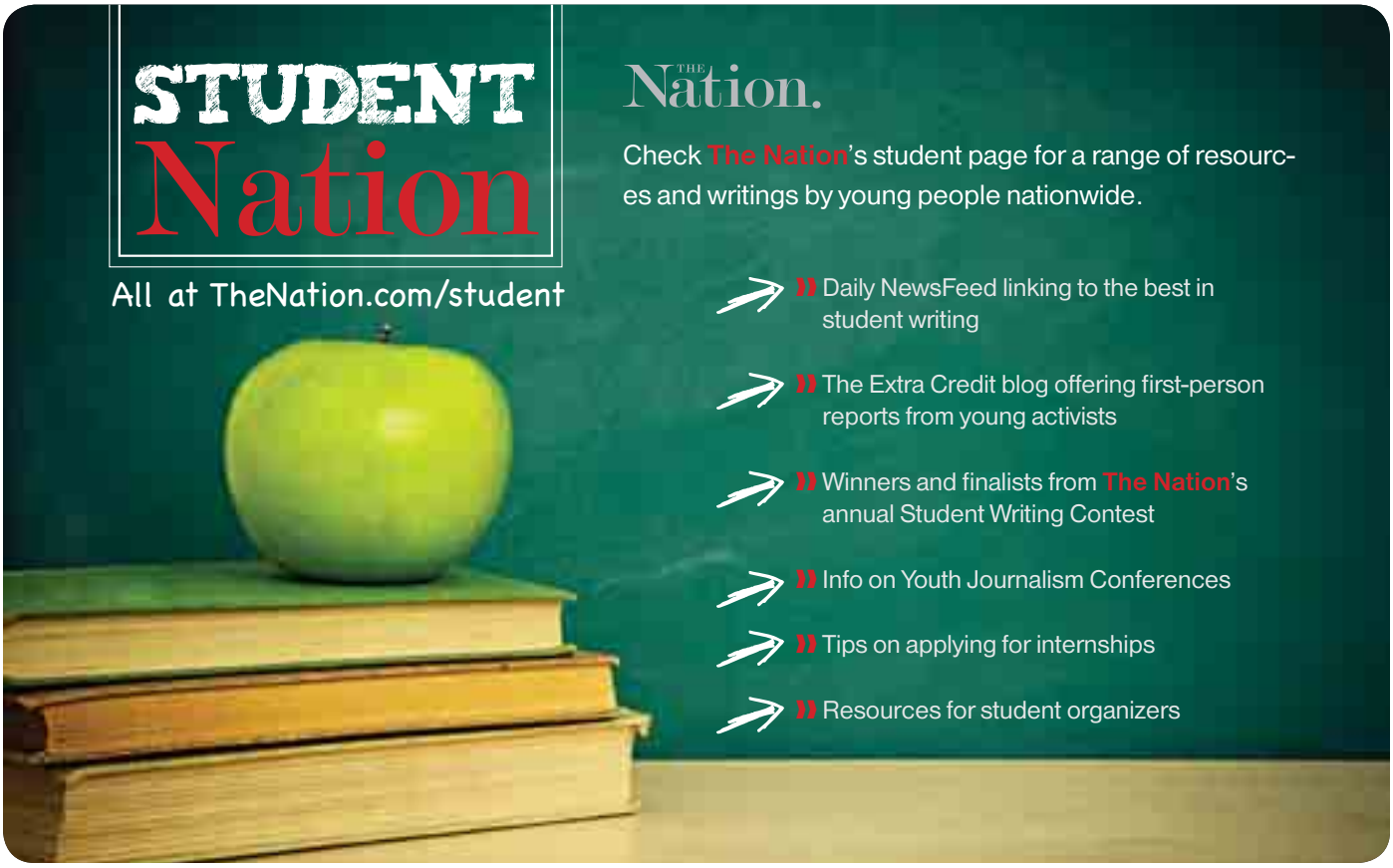
Paul Van Riper in an elaborate simulation game in 2002 (the Pentagon then ran another test, in which it sabotaged Van Riper by installing a disloyal deputy and disarming the bulk of his equipment). But despite his proximity to these proceedings, Rumsfeld is never mentioned by name in *Blink*. Nor, for that matter, is Bush.

It seems odd that Gladwell would write an entire chapter about the war without ever mentioning two of its main protagonists, almost as if he might believe his readers were paying so little attention that they could forget whose hunches about a failed battle plan had gotten them into this mess. And perhaps he did. In *The New Republic*, Richard Posner jeered that *Blink* "is written like a book intended for people who do not read books." But that's not quite right: *Blink* appears to have been written not for people who don't read books but for people who read only books that spend years on the bestseller lists, books you can talk about with your boss or buy in bulk for the marketing department.

Gladwell has documented his love-hate relationship with such books: he has gone on the record about his disdain for the diet-book industry, but he has also described his admiration for Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*. And if Taleb is Gladwell's hero, his villain is, as Taleb's was, the mendacious and self-aggrandizing CEO. In 2001 Gladwell ridiculed Michael Eisner, Sumner Redstone and Jack Welch for ripping off Lee Iacocca's formula for the corporate memoir wherein modest, homespun beginnings and "gruff, no-nonsense" mentors lay the foundations for a self-made man to make his way to the corner office. *Outliers* is Gladwell's corrective to this genre. In it, we learn that Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and sundry other titans of Silicon Valley were all born into affluent households in the mid-1950s and otherwise benefited from a variety of cultural and circumstantial factors that yielded some of the world's most successful people.

And so once again we find Gladwell muckraking in the trenches of banal cliché and thereby reinforcing said cliché—and, more insidiously, banality itself. In *Outliers*, as in *Blink*, he appears to assume that the unexamined life is the only sort his readers could be living, though lessons with titles like "Demographic Luck" and "The Importance of Being Jewish" suggest that he may have downgraded his expectation of who his readers are from the less savvy to the truly oblivious. *Outliers* contains a few new terms and morsels of trivia: the 10,000-Hour Rule describes the number of practice hours one must put in to attain true genius; we also learn that fourteen of the seventy-five individuals on Gladwell's list of the "richest people in human history" were Americans born between 1831 and 1840. (Cleopatra is No. 21.) But for the most part, the book's first section, "Opportunity," contains nothing that will enlighten anyone who has given even a small fraction of 10,000 hours of thought to the word's meaning.

But it is when Gladwell ventures from the home of the brave to foreign cultures—primarily the Asian ones we've voted most likely to succeed—that *Outliers* begins to rely on clichés that are not only inane but, in some cases, comically offensive. In a section on the crash of a Korean Air passenger jet, Gladwell blames cultural deference for enabling numerous preventable in-flight disasters on the carrier—and credits the airline's ability to overcome its rigid "cultural legacy" for steering Korean Air back toward safety. We also travel to China's rice paddies, where the Chinese long ago learned—at least in the south, the region where rice is farmed—teamwork, self-discipline and the appreciation of complex but "meaningful" work that has enabled them to dominate global manufacturing. And in the most convoluted section of *Outliers*,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Gladwell repurposes an argument from a book called *The Number Sense* that posits that Asians are good at math because in Chinese, the numerals one through nine are single-syllable, so brief to think or speak that Chinese children can fit a great many of them in their heads in any given time span, which gives them a self-perpetuating cognitive edge from the age they learn to count. From here, Gladwell explains that these tiny numerals are ordered in a system simpler than ours (the number eleven, for example, is expressed as ten-one) and that this ease and logic, combined with the discipline they've learned diligently tending their rice paddies, is what makes not just Chinese students of mathematics but also Japanese and Korean students superior to their Western counterparts.

For now let's ignore Gladwell's agronomical observations as well as the fact that the *Number Sense* argument can't apply to Japanese or Korean, in which several of the numbers from one through nine are polysyllabic. Let's instead turn a Gladwellian eye to a sixteenth-century Italian missionary named Matteo Ricci. One of the first Westerners to travel to China, in 1583, Ricci found a nation that was not, it might surprise you to learn, very good at math. His twenty-seven-year stay in China is described in detail in *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (1984), a book by historian Jonathan Spence. Under previous dynasties the Chinese had made significant advances in mathematics, but during the European Renaissance China's Ming emperors—whose primary goal was to reassert Chinese cultural supremacy after a hundred years of humiliating Mongol rule—prioritized literature and art over scientific discovery, a bias they reinforced through a rigorous examination system that governed advancement in civil service. The turning or tipping point or whatever came when Ricci learned Chinese. While all the conventional, data-supported wisdom tells us that languages are best learned young, when the dramatic burdens of meaning and experience are less likely to clog up the process, Ricci had a counteradvantage: learning Chinese as what Gladwell would term a "late bloomer," at an age (31) by which he had absorbed enough meaning and experience to approach the task with some deliberation. It was a formidable undertaking that required the mastery of thousands of complex characters, some of which contained more than twenty strokes. But the Jesuits of the era were keen on mnemonic devices as a method of keeping their minds active during prayer sessions; while praying they might, for instance, try to focus by visualizing Christ suffering on the cross.

Ricci saw in Chinese characters a built-in framework for remembering meaning, and within a few years he had not only learned the language but had fine-tuned his sensibilities to reflect the cultural norms it articulated, replacing the humble, Buddhist monastic garb he'd donned to fit in with the locals with the extravagant silk robes that marked a learned man. Ricci soon began work on a book in Chinese, a study guide for merchants' sons cramming for the government-service exam. His innovation was to introduce these aspiring bureaucrats to memory tricks that would enhance that very susceptibility to memorization that is inherent in the language. In other words, learning to write Chinese requires so much sustained, focused concentration and memorization that any skill that relies heavily on these qualities is by definition apt to come easier to those who write Chinese, which, since Ricci's time, many more Chinese have learned to do. Put in *The Tipping Point*'s terms, Ricci's success as both a Maven and a Connector was due to his keen appreciation of the "Stickiness Factor" of the Chinese language. Math was a footnote: along with drafting one of the first maps of the world seen in China, Ricci translated Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* into Chinese, as well as various other texts in ethics and cosmography, all with the goal of introducing the Chinese to the Christian God who would save their souls.

Ricci hid his true motives for two decades, the Jesuits having agreed to keep quiet about Christianity until they had the emperor's explicit permission to stay in China. Once that was achieved, Ricci began proselytizing a brand of faith from which most mentions of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary and the saints were stricken, and the crucifixion had been scrapped altogether. What Hugh Trevor-Roper called his "gentlemanly deism" generally emphasized the study of math and science over ritual devotion, and he convinced many Confucian scholars that Christians and Confucians believed in the same God. At one point Ricci had a dream in which he met a man who asked him, "Is this the way you wander about this vast kingdom, imagining that you can uproot an age-old religion and replace it with a new one?" Ricci concluded that the man was actually God, who was encouraging him to persevere.

It is still a challenge to pinpoint the nature of Ricci's core beliefs (he spent his dying days on an increasingly zealous mission to stamp out the influence of Buddhist "idol-worshippers" on the virtuous Confucians). It has been suggested that the stress and secrecy of his work left him in poor mental health, but his efforts, along with those of many other Jesuits keenly sensitive to context, eventually converted hundreds of thousands of Chinese to Christianity.

Can revisiting Matteo Ricci's memory palace help illuminate the modern-day mind of Malcolm Gladwell? I wonder if Gladwell sees himself as an office-park missionary dispatched by the church of academe to tour the lecture circuit and convert the leaders of corporate America with "good news" from the ivory tower, its gospel made easy and ecumenical by all those helpful exercises and sticky new terms.

In that case, perhaps Gladwell's intellectual compromises are neither commercial nor unintentional but rather a necessary outgrowth of his higher calling: to explore the secret workings of the world and impart the resulting data to its self-appointed stewards, the titans of industry. This conclusion, if true, may resolve many of the most puzzling incongruities riddling Gladwell's articles: his continued defense of the pharmaceutical industry even as he advocates for single-payer healthcare; his refusal to indict the financial sector's rigged "star system" as the engine of corruption that it is; the meticulous bleaching of his own prose so that he's whitewashed out any real context, any framework in which wars and economic collapses can actually be understood as wars and economic collapses rather than simulations or malfunctions; his near total avoidance of academic thought that does not base its findings on things observed in labs (with the exception of Carl Jung, whose legacy he reduces to the popularization of personality tests); his coyness about politics; and most memorably, his irritating, unrelenting readability.

A kindred spirit of Gladwell's hero, Professor Nassim Nicholas Taleb, makes an appearance in *Outliers* in the form of Chris Langan, another misanthropic genius who seems more amused by the foibles of humanity than eager to assist his inferiors in correcting them. Langan, whose IQ is so high it cannot be quantified, dropped out of Reed College after his first year because his dirt-poor Montana upbringing failed to instill in him the "practical intelligence" to navigate the byzantine bureaucracy of the school's financial aid office. Langan now lives with his wife, a clinical neuropsychologist he met through the ultrahigh-IQ community, on a horse ranch he bought in rural

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Missouri, where he spends his days working out a unified model of reality. He also occasionally makes media appearances as a sort of intellectual curiosity; these culminated in a win on the NBC game show *1 vs. 100*, where his triumph over the collective intelligence of 100 average Americans earned him $250,000.

Gladwell writes that when he went to visit Langan on his farm, the genius "seemed content" with his lot in life but revealed himself to be otherwise through his conflicted answer to the hypothetical question of whether he would take a professorship at Harvard were one offered to him. "Obviously, as a full professor at Harvard I would count," Langan said. But he added that, then again,

> Harvard is basically a glorified corporation, operating with a profit incentive. That's what makes it tick. It has an endowment in the billions of dollars. The people running it are not necessarily searching for truth and knowledge. They want to be big shots, and when you accept a paycheck from these people, it is going to come down to what you want to do and what you feel is right versus what the man says you can do to receive another paycheck.

It is this attitude, this commitment to his own outlier status, that makes Langan's such a "heartbreaking story" in Gladwell's mind, this despite the fact that to all appearances Langan is a happy man, a success on his own terms, who has said that he has chosen a life of meaning over one of conventional achievement. To this, Gladwell replies:

> Even in his discussion of Harvard, it's as if Langan has no conception of the culture and particulars he's talking about.... What? One of the main reasons college professors accept a lower paycheck than they could get in private industry is that university life gives them the freedom to do what they want to do and what they feel is right. Langan has Harvard backwards.

Maybe Langan has Harvard backwards, or maybe he is a subscriber to *The New Yorker*:

> The admissions directors at Harvard have always...been diligent about rewarding the children of graduates, or, as they are quaintly called, "legacies." In the 1985-92 period, for instance, Harvard admitted children of alumni at a rate more than twice that of non-athlete, non-legacy applicants, despite the fact that, on virtually every one of the school's magical ratings scales, legacies significantly lagged behind their peers. Karabel [Jerome Karabel, a sociologist who wrote *The Chosen*, a book about university admissions] calls the practice "unmeritocratic at best and profoundly corrupt at worst," but rewarding customer loyalty is what luxury brands do.... The endless battle over admissions in the United States proceeds on the assumption that some great moral principle is at stake in the matter of whom schools like Harvard choose to let in—that those who are denied admission by the whims of the admissions office have somehow been harmed. If you are sick and a hospital shuts its doors to you, you are harmed. But a selective school is not a hospital, and those it turns away are not sick. Élite schools, like any luxury brand, are an aesthetic experience—an exquisitely constructed fantasy of what it means to

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belong to an élite—and they have always been mindful of what must be done to maintain that experience.

That is also Gladwell, explaining the Ivy League admissions process in 2005. But Harvard, he seems to have since recognized, is a fantasy seductive enough to unite Christians and Confucians. The pilgrims come to Gladwell seeking salvation in success, and for what it is worth, he gives them the old college try. ■

ANNE MARIE FOX

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Survivors

by STUART KLAWANS

When a filmmaker chooses to title his movie *Precious: Based on the Novel "Push" by Sapphire*, you know what qualities not to expect from him: concision, reticence, subtlety, allusiveness. You may also anticipate, correctly, a lack of excessive self-regard. Before you've even bought your ticket, producer-director Lee Daniels has disavowed any claim to have thought up his project's sensational premise. I will soon get around to praising him for this modesty, and for his film as a whole. First, though, I need to deal with the question he's raised about the relationship between the movie and its source.

Like *Push* before it, *Precious* purports to give voice to someone who is midway in status between a fictional character and a worst-case scenario: an illiterate, battered, obese, welfare-dependent 16-year-old girl in 1980s Harlem who at the start of the story is pregnant for the second time by her now-missing father. This is someone who can defiantly describe herself (in both the novel and the film's voiceover narration) as a loud-talking, gluttonous offense to middle-class white society: "Ugly black grease to be wipe away." The principal difference between the novel and the movie lies in the contrasting modes of irony they use to undo this hellish stereotype (which they themselves have called up) and affirm the character's humanity. The novel does this work by drawing attention to the gap between Claireece Precious Jones's inner world and her painfully limited powers of expression. (She is "in the ninfe grade" and has a daughter who "got Down Sinder.") The movie draws your attention to the gap between Precious's painfully limited circumstances and the extravagant means of expression at Daniels's command.

He does not merely suggest Precious's inner world. He makes it explode in full movie color against a jumpin' soundtrack. The dimly lit box of daily suffering splinters apart, and Precious, suddenly draped in leopard skin and blessed with good hair, will sweep ecstatically onto a red carpet. Or she will receive encouraging nods and winks from the animated pictures in her photo

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album; or look in the mirror and see that she's slim, pretty and blond; or literally become absorbed in the movie playing on TV—De Sica's *Two Women*, if I'm not mistaken—and begin speaking Italian in a black-and-white world.

In the novel, Precious describes such imaginative longings in her own words. This isn't to say that the author's voice and the narrator's are perfectly merged—the disguise is sometimes thin or inconsistent—but the match is close enough for novelistic convention. More important, language eventually becomes the medium for Precious's growing sense of self-worth—*Push* is the story of an education—so that circumstance, fantasy and aspiration are all made of one malleable substance. In the film, though, Daniels's set pieces split author from character, imagination from reality, in a way that cinematic convention does not entirely cover. Yes, these directorial flights wring pathos from Precious's pop-culture dreams, which abase her heart even while lifting it. But as parodies, they elicit, perhaps unavoidably, a slight condescension toward the entertainments of the recent past and the people who were suckers for them. As amusements for the audience, they remove the viewer temporarily (blessedly) from the overall oppressiveness of the character's life. Not least, as vehicles for performance, they give the remarkable young actress who plays Precious, Gabourey Sidibe, a few much-needed opportunities to show that she is not really this character.

Sidibe is a big woman—perhaps even bigger than the figure you might picture to yourself when reading *Push*—and comes onto the screen with the sort of shock effect that can be faked but in this case is not. You know the flesh is hers; and given the way she inhabits it in the early scenes, you can't help wondering whether she also might own the glare, the scowl, the rolling gait and the purposeful mumble. (It swallows both rage and shame.) Even if Sidibe's behavior is an act, it exposes something vulnerable in a real woman. Even if the woman signed on willingly for the exposure, she did so with almost as little power over her director as Precious has over the world. So the suspicion arises: in helping Daniels dramatize the humiliation of Precious, did Sidibe participate in her own?

The answer, delivered in the first fantasy sequence, comes with a mile-wide smile, a rolling wave of chin-to-toe dance moves and a note-perfect imitation of a starlet chirping into the microphones. Sidibe is rescued from the doom of first impressions—and given the way movies work, the character is rescued with her, even before the plot gets properly started and Precious begins her course of enlightenment in an alternative school.

This isn't to say that the film's pedagogical narrative could have been skipped. (If anything, it's almost too important to the movie, which takes care to instruct Precious in everything a well-intentioned audience would want her to learn, from the alphabet to tolerance toward lesbians.) Nor does the revelation of Sidibe's many-sidedness relieve the character from having to endure a singularly constricted life. (Although I've said a lot about the imaginative breaks in the film, your strongest memory might be of a gloomy, uterine apartment, lit solely by the TV set, where Precious is always within her mother's striking distance.) Reality grinds on, and grinds down, in *Precious*; and yet there's always a degree of play—in the sense of slack, as well as make-believe—in the way Sidibe both inhabits the character and escapes from her.

I think everything that's most admirable about *Precious* can be summed up in Daniels's treatment of Sidibe: how he keeps her safe and intact within a fully committed performance. This is more than kindness toward a novice who took on a risky role. It's part of a pattern in Daniels's approach, and evidence of his paradoxical modesty.

For a filmmaker with an excellent Rolodex and a taste for lurid subject matter—think of his producing *Monster's Ball* and recruiting Halle Berry for the lead—Daniels has a way of undoing his own flashiness by casting against the grain. In *Precious*, he chose a comedian, Mo'Nique, to play the vile, violent, horrendously damaged mother; a rock star, Lenny Kravitz, to be a sweetly patient maternity nurse (the only decent man in the film, and the only one with a real speaking part); and an international sex symbol, Mariah Carey (the shining tresses hidden beneath a shaggy dark wig, the renowned bosom dowdily concealed), to be the crusty welfare caseworker whose ethnicity is a puzzle to Precious. All of them are implicitly more than the roles they portray; but none of them venture even a single wink at the audience. So the celebrities are rendered unobtrusive, while the newcomer (the only one who gets to break character) is elevated to the level of the stars.

It takes humility for a director to stand back and let the endless possibilities of human character assert themselves; just as it takes humility to locate the heart of a novel

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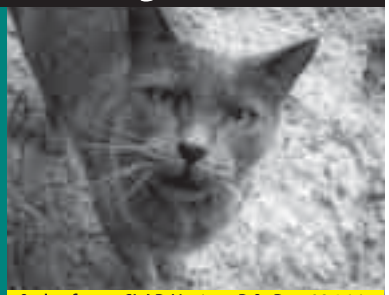

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and translate it from twisted, uncertain words into gestures, expressions and tones of voice. That's why, however much of Lee Daniels I see in this movie, I see more of the cast, the city, the period, the conditions. That's why, despite my chronic suspicion of social-realist freak shows and tales to inspire moral uplift, I recognize something I can trust in *Precious*.

Besides, it's devastating.

The first third of Oren Moverman's new drama, *The Messenger*, is so cadenced and automotive that it might almost be Iranian. Two US soldiers—an experienced, older captain (Woody Harrelson) and a young sergeant who is uncomfortably new to his assignment (Ben Foster)—drive around an unnamed area, where they visit a variety of buildings, introduce themselves to a variety of characters and at each stop officially inform someone that a child or spouse has been killed in Iraq. That's about it. There's little for you to think about beyond the streets glimpsed through the windshield, the recitation of the prepared script ("The secretary of defense regrets to inform you…") and the reaction that has to be endured. This part of the film is structured to reduce you to tears at ten-minute intervals, and it succeeds.

Maybe you think America needs a movie like this—in which case, Harrelson's character will agree with you. While training Foster in the performance of his duty, which requires a lot of nerving up before the task and a lot of simmering down afterward, he adds a political tirade to his unfiltered stream of instruction, invective, self-dramatization and lewd opinionating, to the effect that citizens who endorse a war ought to know its cost. Harrelson needn't have said it; the events you've seen have already made the point. But the soldier he's playing is the expansive type—Foster is the one who's quiet and tightly wound—so the speech gets by as a character's outpouring, as much as a filmmaker's statement.

The other line of dialogue that serves such a dual purpose is spoken in anger by Foster when he can no longer bear to deliver the blow and then retreat, in soldierly discipline, from its result: "We walk into these people's lives. We don't know shit." The sergeant will therefore learn. He needs to connect with another human being (Harrelson at this point doesn't count); while Moverman, for his part, needs to get the audience involved in the character's emotions. Granted, America needs to grieve; but it won't pay at the box office for 105 minutes of pure mourning. So we get the rest of *The Messenger*, which develops the little hints of backstory about Foster that were planted in the first third, while moving him into an awkward courtship with a freshly widowed military wife (Samantha Morton).

The adrenaline level drops, the whiff of political bile dissipates and *The Messenger* becomes a lesser film than it was at the beginning—but not at all a bad one. For one thing, it continues to be about the survivors, those people the sergeant said he wanted to know, without yet being able to admit that he was one of them. For another thing, it justifiably puts its faith in Foster, an actor with a bladelike body and edgy light baritone, who in previous roles has earned something of a reputation for psychopathic menace. If you've seen him in *Alpha Dog* or the remake of *3:10 to Yuma*, you know him by his thin, sardonic smile and quickness of attack. Here, all that nervous power is turned inward. Foster watches, and holds himself in check. You sense the strain; but this time, the character you fear for is him.

I admire *The Messenger*, some of it enormously. I just wish that the healing didn't have to start so fast. We've waited a long time for a Moverman to make us feel the wound. Couldn't we have borne it for one more hour?

The flying fish have turned into airplanes in an upside-down world, dropping fish-bombs into a rising sea of flames. It is August 1945, and Emperor Hirohito (Issey Ogata) is dreaming in his marine biology laboratory. Sometime after he awakens, he will be informed that the Americans are waiting to take him away. He will emerge alone from the little white villa, dressed in a swallowtail suit, and allow the soldiers to conduct him to the headquarters of General MacArthur, where for the first time in his life he will turn a doorknob by himself. Despite the pain it causes MacArthur's interpreter, Hirohito will also lower himself by speaking English to the American general. He is continually busy forming silent words, his lips gulping like a fish.

Scenes from Alexander Sokurov's 2005 film *The Sun*: the third work in his twentieth-century dictators series, after *Moloch* (Hitler) and *Taurus* (Lenin), and the one that's melancholy and a little hopeful. After a long delay, it is at last being distributed theatrically in the United States, starting with a run in New York at Film Forum (opening November 18). Nobody who cares about film will need a second hint. ■

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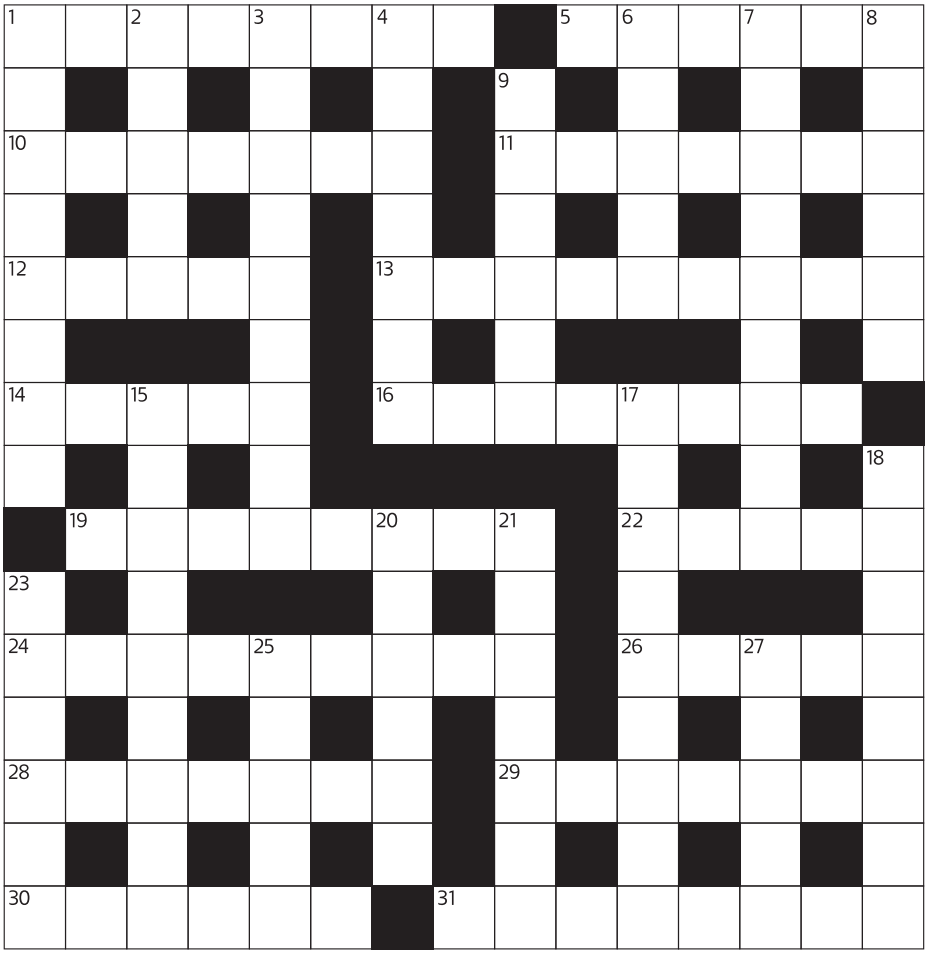

ACROSS

1 A living thing about to have almost what any type of actor is doing. (One hopes the kids are!) (8)

5 Taw, possibly—proving Mable is about right! (6)

10 The players might hope for a good one, as things develop. (7)

11 Trials, otherwise throws out the cards. (7)

12 Pyle, for instance, being one point in the lake. (5)

13 Madame hopes the new dress will, which is proper. (9)

14 The series of items has the last letter intended for the composer. (5)

16 What's the point to darning your socks, for example—at least changing things for the better! (8)

19 As for the kids they like such—which might be the hour for Hamlet. (8)

22 It could be the preface to a big blow-up, or a least the intro for such. (5)

24 Give a shout to Pierre, before Tim is confused about the start of *Collected Reviews and Analysis*. (9)

26 A final letter? Bear with it, possibly—it might be crossing in London. (5)

28 Listens again to almost all of the rehearsal? (7)

29 Neither sharp nor flat, being the usual thing. (7)

30 The old writer offers a safe home to such as Teddy… (6)

31 …and helped him out. (8)

DOWN

1 Another name for a bollard, to possibly rely on the result in an untasteful way. (8)

2 The girl objectively gets on as a real bird! (5)

3 A musician might play one with 10, possibly (only the last half) in a pretty wild way! (9)

4 Worthy of your attention, but can't do much about anything. (7)

6 Go carefully over the figures, in Paris to get said properly. (5)

7 A real looney from Rio? (Three-sided, too!) (6,3)

8 Dash to sing badly for a type of banner. (6)

9 A large number of what might get charged in Java commonly. (6)

15 The ego takes over when one so acts, and is fleshly, perhaps. (9)

17 Zen: do it! It straightened out an operatic composer. (9)

18 Bone up on being given a name—being given a name. (2-6)

20 Here in Paris, the east of Paris is most frigid… (6)

21 …so such fancy garments might be welcome! (7)

23 Leave a lasting mark on Ed, and be a bit frightened because of it. (6)

25 Look, I'm a genius! Get the picture? (5)

27 One might find it overhead in place of 20. (5)

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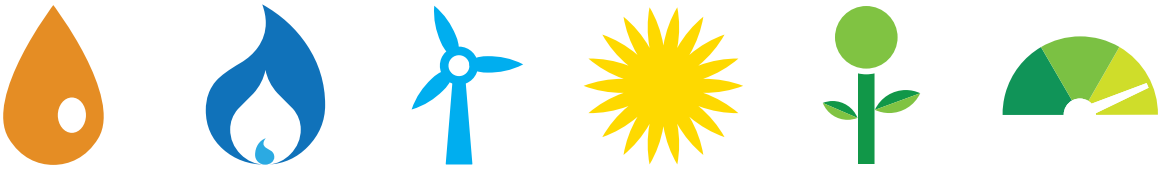

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